A TEI Project

Interview of Joe Razo

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session One (February 15, 2013)

ESPINO

This is Virginia Espino, and today is February 15. I'm interviewing Joe Razo at his home in Alhambra. This is Alhambra, correct?

RAZO

Right, Alhambra.

ESPINO

Thank you so much for agreeing to interview with me. I'd like to start with your birth date and then what you can tell me about your family history, where your parents and your grandparents come from.

RAZO

Okay. I was born July 7, 1938, in El Paso, Texas. And my parents, both my mother and my father come from Chihuahua, Mexico, and we lived in—it must have been a housing project because of the fact that I remember that we lived in a brick building, and it was a single-story brick building, but many of the rooms were right next to each other.

I remember fondly that the community seemed to be very close-knit in the sense that during the summer when it gets hot at night, all the people would bring their radios and chairs outside of the sidewalk there on the porches and just sit there and exchange food and exchange stories about what was happening. Whenever there was a big fight like the Joe Louis-Ezzard Charles fight, someone would bring a big box radio, and everyone would gather around it and you would hear what was going on and a lot of shouting and cheering. It was in many instances a close-knit community.

I remember that I had a little dog named Spotty. I also remember that once in a while we would go a couple of blocks down by the railroad track, or at least it appeared to be a couple of blocks, and the servicemen, because that was during the World War II ages, would be passing by, and sometimes they would throw change out of their windows to the kids who were gathering around, and, of course, we would all scramble just like candy from a piñata. And oftentimes you would see the cattle being herded around the railroad and being loaded into boxcars and everything.

I believe that we moved from Texas when I was six to immigrate here to Los Angeles. I do remember going to an elementary school there, and later on my mother showed me my report cards, and it always said, “You must speak more English to Jose.” My real name is Jose Angel Razo, Jr., but everyone has called me “Joe” from the beginning, and so that is a name that I adopted. Apparently I was having trouble with the English language because I was only speaking Spanish at school.

When my father came back from the navy, he had trouble getting employment, and so I think before, he had worked at a supermarket, doing what, I don’t know, but because of his lack of employment, my parents chose to move to California. But I became aware at a very early age that there were some family problems, and the family problems that I recall is that the whole neighborhood—and we must have been really on the lower-class rung—seemed to be always when they came out at night and the hot nights, and they always had quarts of beer. It wasn’t the little cans. It was always the big forty-ouncer type of things. My father always seemed to be involved in some fight or another, and it was usually with his brothers.

ESPINO

His own brothers?

RAZO

Yes, his own brothers, and all of them were drunks, and all of them turned out to be alcoholics, including my father.

I remember that when we moved over here to California, we moved over to East L.A. and lived with my grandmother, the traditional type of three generations living under one roof. It was a little tar paper shack that she was renting, and the whole family moved in there. At that time, I had two older sisters, Alice and Angie, and myself. I don’t believe my brother had been born. No, he had been born. He must have been a baby by then, Frank. And my younger sister, Rachel, had not been born yet.

We lived with them for a while, for about, oh, maybe, six months, and I went to Brooklyn Avenue School. I remember it snowing, the first time we had seen snow in California. Of course, I had a good teacher. You always identify with teachers as role models, because my parents really didn’t have the education to be role models. It was sort of like, “Okay, we’ll feed you and clothe you as best as we can, but you’re sort of on your own,” and so you mix

with the neighborhood kids.

ESPINO

Do you know how far they went in school?

RAZO

I don't think they graduated from high school. Maybe my mother did, but I don't believe so.

ESPINO

Were they literate?

RAZO

Yes, they were literate, both of them were literate, and mostly spoke Spanish, but they knew English, and later on they became naturalized.

Eventually my father started having problems with my uncle, who was a young man, my grandmother's son and my mother's brother, and they almost came to fisticuffs. So one night we were gone from the house with nowhere to live. I remember going to Main Street here in Los Angeles, and at that time they had all these nudie-cutie type of bars where the strippers were and the all-night shows, where all the drunks used to go to get off on the street. Of course, you had an usher that used to come down the aisle and would say, "Hey, no sleeping. No sleeping," type of thing. Here I was as a kid, and we're seeing some movie, I don't know what movie it was, but I do remember the usher coming up to us a couple of times and saying, "Hey, no sleeping at all."

ESPINO

The whole family was in this movie theater?

RAZO

Yes. Well, the whole family was at the movie. We had no place to go. Apparently my father called his other sister, Estefana, who was married to a judge—at least I think she was married—and she lived in Glendale, and so they took us in for about a week or so. Margie was her daughter, my cousin, and Margie was a teacher and had gone to college and so forth. We looked up to her, an educated person.

ESPINO

Sure.

RAZO

We stayed there for about a week and so forth. Then my father was always hustling, just like an immigrant, standing outside Home Depot. He was always looking for gardening jobs or any carpentry jobs, handyman type of thing, and he finally found a few places that would

employ him intermittently. He was working in Hollywood and Beverly Hills and wherever he could. My mother was trying to find work cleaning houses or anything that she could. We lasted maybe with my aunt in Glendale for about a week or so, maybe a little longer, and then we found a place to live over on Floral and, I think, Blanchard, over west of the City Terrace type of area or a little further than that, and it was a garage.

My father was handy with his tools, converted the garage, built a loft where we could put mattresses and sleep in there. The lady in front, who was the owner, had a couple of twins and called them cuates, and that's where we lived for maybe two or three years.

ESPINO

No bathroom, no running water?

RAZO

I can't even remember going to the bathroom in there. I don't know where the—there was a sink, because that's where they used to do the laundry, and so we used that for running water. As I was growing up then later on, I found out that's not unusual. Many of my friends were in the same boat, that I saw in junior and senior high school.

But from there I would walk over to Hammel Street School, which I had attended when we were living for that couple of months with my grandmother, and it was a good walk, maybe two or three miles, and I would go over there. I remember elementary school as a process of really learning what it is to really live under those type of conditions, and we were lucky if we averaged a meal a day. There were times that were happy times. My younger sister entered some contest, and she won some coupons from the Helms Truck. The Helms Truck would deliver stuff and sell bread and cookies and stuff like that—

ESPINO

Pastries, yes.

RAZO

—on the street. She won some contest, and so we were able to gorge ourselves with her coupons for a while. She also had a friend who was handicapped, who apparently had a hard time making friends, and so she would use her credit at a store to sometimes buy us some groceries. That was just the reality.

Then there was a Russian immigrant about half a block who used to drive a trash truck, and every once in a while he would take me on the weekends to help clean out—and I was in elementary school—clean out stores and empty the trash and take them to the dump and so forth. Sometimes they would give him a fish, and he would give me half of the fish and I would bring it home.

Of course, my father and mother were still hustling to make a living, and my father was

always a very proud man. We did not receive donations. We were not on welfare. It was what we earned is the way.

ESPINO

Or nothing.

RAZO

That's right.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

Many times, again, it was nothing. When you got the potatoes, you saved the peelings because then you could fry the peelings afterwards, and that was another meal that you could save.

I learned early in life about popcorn [Spanish word] and chiles. Chiles hold your hunger at bay, so you eat chiles, you're not going to be too hungry. Your tongue is burning. [Spanish word] fills you up. It may not be good for you, and that's the same thing with popcorn. So we would get by, by the stove, and in those times we didn't have a heater, so whatever little stove my father hooked up is your heater too. So you open the oven, and that's how you heat the garage, and a lot of blankets, a lot of quilts.

ESPINO

Was the oven a wood-burning oven, that you recall?

RAZO

No, it was—

ESPINO

It was gas.

RAZO

I remember it was a gas and an old gas stove.

I also remember at elementary school, apparently I had some problem, because I did get into quite a number of fights, not during school, but it was always after school. "Meet you in the alley," and usually I picked on the bigger, taller kids and got the heck beat out of me.

ESPINO

So you think that the fights were because of something you did?

RAZO

It could have been. It could have been because, maybe, the poverty, and I had a chip on my shoulder, and you learn in the neighborhood that whenever you get on a fight, strike first. Don't sit there and talk about it. You strike first. If you strike first, usually you get the upper hand. So whenever I would get into an argument, it was, boom, I would leave off and jump the guy. But, again, I had more than my share of defeats, and I would come home bloody, and, of course, my mother would clean me out before my father came and got on my case. But I also learned from all the fights that my father had before with his brothers. Some of his brothers moved to California at that time, and every once in a while they would come by, and someone would have a truck that they either borrowed or they owned, and all of us would pile up in the back of the pickup truck.

ESPINO

So even after they would fight, they would reconcile?

RAZO

Yes, yes. They were drunks, and some of them were [Spanish word] and turmoil in many of the families.

ESPINO

Did you ever think about that kind of alcoholism, what caused it, or is that something you reflected on?

RAZO

Later on, when I went to college, but majored in psychology—

ESPINO

Oh, you did?

RAZO

Oh, yes, and gained some insight.

But from there at the elementary school level, I went to Belvedere Junior High School, and from there, the woman who was renting us a garage said, "I have a house," that had burned down. Well, not completely, but had burned and there was a lot of damage. She said, "I will sell it to you guys, and you pay me on a monthly basis, and this is what I would charge you, and you can live on it." That was off of Dangler near Brooklyn Avenue School near what is called Cesar Chavez now, used to be Brooklyn Avenue before.

We moved there, and we said, “Wow, we’re in seventh heaven.” There were holes in the house because of the burned lumber, and so we would go to the furniture store with our little red wagon, and we would get the cardboard boxes that the box the refrigerators, the stoves—those are big nice cardboards, and we would bring those cardboards home, and we’d help my father nail those from the inside out so that the wind wouldn’t come in. Later on we could earn enough money to be able to buy boards and start replacing those burned boards little by little into the house.

Of course, the dirt in the yard was—nothing grew on it, it was hard as concrete, and we would try and grow grass and that kind of stuff. But my father, being a proud man, would dress up in a suit every morning when he went to work, and people thought he had a good job in the neighborhood because he was always with his nice hat and suit and his cowboy boots, like most of the people from Mexico wear, and get on the bus with a suitcase. Well, the suitcase was a wooden suitcase that he built with a latch on it, and those were all his tools, his gardening tools and stuff like that, little shovels that he could fold and hammers and saws and everything. So it must have weighed a ton, but there he was. He’d walk his three or four blocks to Brooklyn Avenue where he would get one of many, many buses and make it all the way to Beverly Hills and to Hollywood to earn a living. He came home late at night, and by that time he already had two or three good drinks under him. That was his style of life, and that was the style of life that we learned growing up.

ESPINO

Did he bring that violence into the home, the violence with his—

RAZO

Yes, later on. It was always there, and with us it was always for discipline, the belt or striking you. My mother would say, “Don’t hit them on the head. We don’t want one growing up be dumb. You’re going to damage their brains.”

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

Many times when he would come home and my mother would look at him and make sure that he was asleep, and if he had a number of drinks, he was sound asleep snoring, and then she would go through his pockets to make sure that we have enough money to survive on.

ESPINO

Sounds like an innovative person.

RAZO

I would go through his drawer, and I would find half a nickel, some coins, and I’d say, “Half a nickel, that’s interesting.” I wanted to make sure he didn’t find out that I went through his

dressing drawer. I would find a Derringer, two-shot Derringer, and I thought, “Wow.” Make sure I closed it back and everything was placed back in the way he had them.

For school clothes and so forth, my mother started working in the garment industry, sewing, and she would sew a lot of the clothes for the kids. Then she got credit from a Mr. Philips, who had a clothing store for children’s, and he would give her credit. We would go out and pick out pants and shirts and that kind of stuff and keep the clothes to a minimum because we couldn’t afford much.

But before that, I forgot to mention that when we lived in that garage on Floral Avenue, there were a number of times that I remember going to school and it was hotter than heck, but here I was wearing a coat. The teacher would ask me, “Joe, why don’t you take off your coat? It’s so hot.”

I said, “No, I’m cold. I think I’m catching a cold.” Well, you weren’t really catching a cold, you were ashamed of what you were wearing, and that’s because you were not wearing a shirt underneath it, and your one or two shirts, everything was being washed by hand and being hung up, and so you toughed it up as best as you can.

Or the kids would say, “Hey, come on, Joe, let’s have lunch together with the rest of the kids.”

And you say, “No, I was hungry at recess and I already ate.” Well, you weren’t hungry; you just didn’t have anything to eat. So the poverty always hung over your head, and poverty was innermost and played a tremendous role in my life in terms of identification and getting involved with the movement and going into psychology, and throughout my career poverty has always played a tremendous role.

Even now sometimes you go to the refrigerator, and my wife says, “Why is it that sometimes you gorge yourself so much?” It’s an old habit, that when it’s available you stuff yourself while you can, because it may not be there later.

Or when I went on camping trips with all my buddies. They would say, “Why do you eat chili for breakfast?” Well, it’s an old habits from way back, and you eat nothing left, and you don’t lose some of those habits that you had before.

ESPINO

Yes, it’s hard to shake those.

RAZO

It influences you, but, again, we fixed the house with a lot of cardboard.

Later on, throughout the neighborhood that I lived in on Brooklyn, many of the kids would say—well, you go to their houses, and their houses basically are in the same condition as yours, or you went to one that, wow, they had a TV. Well, we loved to hang around there, and every once in a while, we got to see TV—that's when TV was just coming in—or standing outside on the porch and peering in through the screen door and looking at the TV.

That was a Mickey Northup's family, and Mickey was a boxer, and the father was also had the same kind of problems, alcohol, and sometimes they would box it off in the neighborhood and go toe to toe. People would say later on when I met them, "Remember so-and-so?"

I said, "Yeah, I remember. Yeah, he used to be a drunk."

And someone else would say, "Well, wasn't everyone else's father?" There were no exceptions. Alcoholism permeated the whole neighborhood. A lot of the young gals, when they were teenagers, were pregnant.

Poverty just was part of our life, and many of us knew we were hungry. We just didn't have any other comparison or role models. Those comparisons really didn't hit me at home until I started going to middle school. Even though I was closer to Kern Avenue School, I went to Belvedere, which was another two or three miles walking. So I got to do a lot of walking and developing of leg muscles during that period, and many times I would have to pass through some gang territory, and sometimes the kids on the way home would challenge me, and so I would run or walk to Brooklyn Avenue School via more commercial route. But when I saw them in school, then I got even and gave them their whacks.

My fighting continued throughout my middle school years. When you look at it, it was the same. I was following the same pattern as my father. I wouldn't let them take advantage of me, and so it was always, "Meet you behind the bungalow over here," and I usually got the best of them. But when I went home to walk home, I'd go out and check the back gate from Belvedere Junior High to see how many kids were waiting for me, or the front gate. Someone would alert me, "Freddy and so-and-so are waiting for you over at the front gate," and I'd take the opposite side.

I wound up with a chip on my shoulder over through junior high, and fortunately I met some good people in middle school. I joined the band, learned how to play the saxophone. Then an individual took me to his house, a Jewish kid by the name of Teddy Wasserman, and had lunch at his house. That's when Boyle Heights was a Jewish community and the houses were mansions at that time. Teddy was a good tenor sax. He played first chair. I played second chair. He used to teach me some of the things, because he was taking private lessons. I learned some good things from Teddy.

Then there was William Shinoff, another Jewish kid, and he taught me how to play chess.

Willie wasn't really athletic, I was athletic, but in order to maintain his grades, he used to pass out towels during the gym before we went in and took our showers, and that's the way he got his "A." I was associating with different companions, different comparisons of the way people were living, but I was still a tough kid or trying to be a tough kid on the side.

Because of my grades, and not so much my grades but because of my conduct in some of the classes, I was put in a special homeroom and taken out of my regular homeroom. Those special class homerooms for kids who misbehaved at that time had probationary officers, and so they were probationary officers who were there for only part of the day. Every week, you had to carry a report card for your conduct and your citizenship and your behavior. For every "U" that you got, you got a swat, and the swat was leather strap that the barbers used to sharpen their blades.

ESPINO

Oh, wow.

RAZO

What you would do is you would trade off. We had anywhere from twelve to six people in that homeroom, and they didn't mix any of the gals with us, because the gals had their own special homerooms. So we had to trade with one another. Of course, if we only gave the guy a kissy tap, then the probation officer would come in, and he would get both of us and whack us as hard as he could.

Well, I found out I really wasn't a tough guy. I spent about two or three weeks in that homeroom before my conduct really improved in the classroom was moved back into my regular homeroom. But before I graduated, there was a kid there, Richard Whitmore, who was Chinese, but he was one of these door-latch type of kids. His father was in China but sent money to the grandmother, and Richard lived in an apartment with either the grandmother or relatives. He always had money, and he was always flashing it.

One day he invited us to go out and party at night, and I went out and met him with about three or four other people in the City Terrace area. He got guys that were going to the liquor store to buy us some hard liquor, and we proceeded to get drunk. Well, I don't know what happened, but I woke up about a day and a half later, and apparently they told me that I was so drunk and that the police had come and had seen me and were trying to take me away. My friends distracted them and took me away, and finally they stashed me in the truck of an abandoned car.

ESPINO

The police?

RAZO

No, the kids.

ESPINO

Your friends.

RAZO

Friends, yes, because they couldn't carry me. When I woke up, I had puked and probably urinated on myself. All I remember is a woman with a couple of girls that were taking me out of the car, and they took me to their house, which was close by, and it happened to be right here by Floral and Eastern Avenue, which was Lopez Mara gang territory, and where I had partied was with the Chiveros, up there by City Terrace by across [unclear] on Eastern Avenue.

So I don't know how I got there to here, but then I said, "Oh, I've got to face the music and go home," because I haven't been home for about a day and a half. So then I went to a friend's house and said, "Hey, I need a change of clothes," and he gave me one of his t-shirts and one of his pants. He was heavyset, so I looked like one of these Cholos nowadays. At that time, they weren't wearing that. The Cholos were wearing khakis, and you used to always put a pleat on your khaki and iron it, and always a white t-shirt, and your cigarettes, you rolled them up in your sleeves type of Elvis Presley type of thing.

When I went home, they said, "Where have you been?" My mother said, "We've had the cops looking for you."

I just said, "I got drunk."

I was surprised that my father did not lay a hand on me, and I think it's because he felt sad that I was following in his footsteps.

ESPINO

You think he was proud?

RAZO

No, no, I think he just he felt it was his fault, but he never said a word to me.

ESPINO

Did he ever give you any kind of advice about anything, about school, about work, about treating your mother, your sisters or your brothers, helping out at home?

RAZO

No. He was not a role model. In fact, when we lived at that house, we used to go into the garage where he had the tools, because my brother always had the ability that my father had, he loved to saw, and he eventually wanted to be a carpenter and fix things. So my

brother was always breaking into the garage, which my father kept locked. My brother would take off a board and go in there and use his tools and then nail it back shut, because he wanted to use the tools.

As kids we used to play games and dig trenches with the shovels, and play soldiers, and all the kids would come and we had the trenches, and we'd make our own rubber guns and shoot at each other, or just a wooden gun, and get a tire inner tube and cut it up and stretch it from one end and shoot it, and when we hit someone, we said "You're dead." From there, my father was really not a role model.

ESPINO

What about your older brother? Did he play like a father?

RAZO

No, he didn't. I was the oldest.

ESPINO

You were the oldest?

RAZO

I was the older brother. I had two older sisters.

Then my father would get in fight with some of the neighbors. Some of the neighbors were in the same boat he was. There were no sidewalks in our neighborhood, no curbs, and so some of the neighbors objected to my father parking next door, and they considered that their space, although there were no street curbs.

My father had his brother over, and I don't know if they were celebrating or what they were doing, and next door a party was going on. So there was after a while a shouting, and the neighbor went out and took out his rifle, and, unfortunately, he mishandled the gun and wound up shooting himself in the leg. It was that kind of type of neighborhood.

ESPINO

Kind of like a Wild West kind of neighborhood.

RAZO

Yes, and the police came. I remember an incident where another uncle, Uncle Mike, who used to play with the mariachis, and wanted me to take out the trumpet so I could also be a mariachi, and I said, "No, the saxophone is for me." And Uncle Mike and dad apparently got into a fight, and he beat the hell out of my father, and then my father got up and followed Uncle Mike went over to his place, which was about a mile away, and he wanted to get even. I think the fight was over Uncle Mike's wife, who was a Chola, and kept leaving him

and hooking up with other people. He went back to get even, balance things out, and so I followed him. Of course, he got the hell knocked out of him again, and I helped carry him home. I was still maybe in middle school somewhere.

Again, that was my role model, and then things started changing, although even in junior high I used to hang around at Brooklyn Avenue School, and we used to play basketball. Some of the local kids were decent kids. Boochie and his brother, I forget his name, we used to go out there, and the gang kids would come over, and we'd be playing basketball and the gang kids would just walk up to them and whack them and home they would go, bloody. "And what are you guys going to do about it, you punks?" Tuck your tail in and go home. There were some hardcore gang kids.

ESPINO

Oh, sure.

RAZO

The gangs had juniors, little kids, all the way on up. I remember one particular day when a couple of gals decided they wanted to play baseball with us. They were playing baseball, and I don't know what it triggered it off, but one of the gals was playing third base, and as the guy hit a long ball and was circling the base, he decided he was going to grab her. He went up to her and grabbed her like that, and then she just—and before you know it, you had a group of guys, and all of them were helping themselves with their hands. She was biting, and before you know it, the attendant or the coach came out from his little room, and there were a lot of kids that were on top of the fences and jumping the fences. I don't know. The cops were called. But that was the kind of environment. There were good times, but there were a hell of a lot of bad times.

I tried to hang out with the bad kids for self-protection, and also I identified with them. There was a group of kids from where we called El Lote. It was a warehouse right across from Brooklyn Avenue School, and we called it El Lote because it was an empty lot. The circuses used to come into town and set up their tents there. All the neighborhood would go out there and see the fat lady, the funny man, the tattooed man, etc.

ESPINO

Not el lote like corn.

RAZO

No. Well, lote means the lot, yes. Some of the guys in that, Junie, they were hardcore. Junie was a nice guy. I mean, he was hardcore. He was a good fighter. But Hernandez brothers, one of them was just a real thug and a real killer, and later on, of course, wound up in prison. But I started hanging out with them.

One day I was at Brooklyn at the playground. I was always a good Ping-Pong player, and I had come out by the basketball court. There weren't too many kids at the playground that

day, and a guy passed by, and he was a stocky build, and he says [Spanish phrase] or something, and I says, “What? Do I know you?”

He said, “No, you punk. Come on outside.”

ESPINO

Just like that?

RAZO

Just like that, yes. Just walking by. So I came out, and as soon as I came out, he hit me in the stomach when I was going underneath the gate and knocked the air out of me. I started backing out, and then he took out a knife, and as I was backing out, he threw it at me.

ESPINO

Oh, jeez.

RAZO

Fortunately the wrong end hit me, or the side end hit me, whatever, it didn’t stick. But I kicked the knife away, and I started backing out, and I said, “Okay, punk, you and me,” and started walking away.

I was leading them to El Lote, where my friends were, and he wised up right away, and he says, “No, but I’ll get you later.” He took off, because he knew that I was going to call my friends.

ESPINO

But were you officially in a gang?

RAZO

No, no.

ESPINO

Never did?

RAZO

No, never joined. I mean, just a group of kids that hung around together but the kids were hardcore. They were so hardcore that about once a month—and we rotated it—on a weekend, two or three of the kids were designated to get the money and to buy a case of beer. When we’re talking about a case of beer, you’re talking about forty-ounce bottles of beer. So a case of beer, and then we would, at night, go over to Belvedere Park where the

sheriff's station—it's probably still there—was at, and it used to be an empty lot. There was no lake there. So since it's an empty lot, and it's like a hoyo, a hole, that's where we drank our beer and got loaded with it, got high with beer.

After a couple weeks of that, I said, "No." I mean, you wake up the next night or the next morning with a hangover, and you just could say, "Man." I'd say, "No, that's not for me." So I said to these guys—that's all they live for. I like my sports. I like playing and that kind of stuff.

ESPINO

But school you didn't like, education?

RAZO

No, no, I was okay. I was a "C" student.

ESPINO

History, English?

RAZO

Yes, and I was a "C" student and very athletic, and I loved to run and play in all the games I always participated in. At Belvedere Junior High, I hung around with or knew most of the kids [unclear] and so many others, but I still hung around with the sort of semi-Cholos, Cholos type of kids, Bobby Iglesias and the ducktails type of kids. I just moved in and out of different groups and—

ESPINO

Sorry for interrupting. But before we move on, how did you feel about the way you—it doesn't sound like you were discriminated in the classroom, like some people talk about being punished for speaking Spanish, being hit, being ridiculed, being humiliated. Did you have that kind of experience in elementary and in middle school?

RAZO

No, not at all. No, I remember. I do remember in elementary school, and it was a black lady who was my teacher, and apparently she left some bruises on me. I don't know what the incident was, but I remember that my mother and father went to school and that they got into a shouting match with her and had a real sit-down, and that never happened again. That was at Brooklyn Elementary School.

In junior high school, I identified with most of my teachers, and the teachers I identified most with were the P.E. teachers, who, because of my athletic ability, always would look after my interests. Although it could have taken a different turn there for the betterment and then for the worse, but at least they showed an interest. For the betterment, they saw that I had running ability. They could have certainly pointed me to a library where I could

have gotten books for running or stuff like that and encouraged me more in that. But I was trying volleyball, a little of everything. I was never a good basketball player, I always shot off of my wrong foot, in terms of coordination. Or a baseball player, but I always was quick and had the speed, so I was able to maneuver.

So, no, I never felt any discrimination by any of the teachers. In fact, many of the teachers were the ones that were providing me with some kind of role model, although it was really not ingrained from there on. But also in junior high, I also learned after that knife incident with that individual, okay, I've got to take care of myself.

As kids, we always used to go to the dump where all the dump trucks take all the rubbish, and we used to pick up boxes of candy and film. And, of course, I wish I had all that film, rolls and reels of film that they show at the movies, and they were discarding that.

ESPINO

Where was the dump?

RAZO

The dump was right across the street, right on top—off the 710, right before it ends, where the sheriff's—

ESPINO

In Pasadena?

RAZO

No, right here in East L.A. where the sheriff station is at, where they have juvenile court now.

ESPINO

The Boyle Heights area?

RAZO

No. It's right here—

ESPINO

East L.A.

RAZO

—off of East L.A., yes, right across the street from the 10 Freeway.

The reason we wanted film is because you could make stink bombs out of them. What you did is you used to snip the 16-millimeter film, wrap it up, coil it in newspaper, and then twist it, and then you would light it, and it wouldn't catch on fire, it would just make smoke. Those were our hand grenades, and anytime we wanted to play a joke on someone, that was stink bombs.

Then I learned the dump was a good place to pick up piping, and someone showed me how to make a homemade gun. What you do is you cut out the model, in wood, of a regular gun, and on the wood here you just gouge it out on top, and you go out and find a barrel that fits a .22 or a .38, whichever bullet you have access to, and you tape it on, wire, tape, everything, and you put the barrel in there. Then you break up one of your cowboy cap guns, and you invert it this way to where the point is at, and you tie a lot of rubber bands around it to get the force, and you pull it back. When you pull it back and it strikes, then the bullet comes out. So I started carrying a homemade gun when I went to the playground because of the guy with the knife and some of the others. Of course, we tried it out on a couple of pigeons first and see if—we knew it fired. Fortunately, I never got a chance to use it.

ESPINO

Were you ready? Were you ready to use it?

RAZO

Oh, absolutely.

ESPINO

Were you ready to kill somebody?

RAZO

Well, at that time, you're foolish, yes. It's either kill or be killed. At that time, gangs are called rat-packers, because there were a number of times when I went to play basketball, too, when I was in high school over at Belvedere Park, and fights would start and with the gang kids, it wasn't one-on-one, it was one against whatever pack they had there. They all jumped in and took care of that individual. That's just the environment that was there, and many of these punks were afraid to take you on by themselves, but as a rat pack, they would jump in and [Spanish phrase], just a lot of kicks.

ESPINO

What would your mom tell you? Would she give you advice or [Spanish word]?

RAZO

My mom would tell me to stay out of trouble, but a lot she didn't know what the heck was happening many of the times, and she was trying to keep my family together and making sure that my sisters didn't leave the house and wind up getting pregnant somewhere, because the other Cholos in the house would always say—and they used to call me Junie in

the neighborhood, [Spanish phrase] and you knew what they were up to.

If you were smaller than they were at the time, and I was, and you're talking about Cholos that were young grown men or, "Tráeme tu hermana," and that kind of stuff. Then you'd say, "No chinges con mi hermana o con mi madre o va a ver pedo." And it wasn't that I was a gang kid. I wasn't. You were just trying to deal with what was happening in your neighborhood.

I would say that the only persons in that neighborhood that I think were leading a decent life was probably the people that lived across the street from me, Delia and her father. Her father worked for L.A. County, probably doing roadwork or something, but he always had an L.A. County suit, and they tried to keep their house clean and that kind of stuff. Of course, any time dusk came, all the young girls went in, went in the house, you know.

ESPINO

What do you mean?

RAZO

Well, no one wanted their daughters to go out with Cholos or be raped or, you know, you wind up—

ESPINO

Oh, dusk. At dusk.

RAZO

Dusk, yes, d-u-s-k. Or you wind up getting in a fight with neighbors over the fact that you're making comments to your sisters or to your daughters.

ESPINO

Did it work with your family? Was your mom able to—

RAZO

Oh, yes. No, my sisters grew up pure. My mother made sure of that, and we made sure that the sisters were home.

Guys, you know, you go out there and you do your thing, and the neighborhood kids would come, "Hey, come on over. Let's go hang out at the corner," or, "Let's go to the playground," and you'd notify your mom you're going to the playground.

But during that time, we also did a lot of hiking. We didn't call it hiking. It was, "Hey, let's go to the hills." [Spanish phrase], or, "Do you want to go just over by—," what we call Bear

Lake. It wasn't really a lake. Later on it turned out to be a hole where a lot of the sewer water was being dumped, and that's right next to Cal State L.A. It was probably a lot of germs in the water, but it was deep enough to where it accumulated, and that's where we went swimming.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

Yes, jumped in there, and watched out for the glass.

But it was a good hike, because it was about two or three miles from where we lived, having to hike. We used to go through a hole that they had in the brickyard where the Floral Theater used to be, right off of Floral and Eastern. There used to be a drive-in before. We used to go through that, and a little creek bed used to go through all those hills and down. I learned that it was just nice getting away and being in the hills.

A couple of times we encountered people with .22 rifles, because all that area was just nothing but barren, all hills, and when we tried to get close to them for whatever reason, they shot over our heads, and, of course, we said, "What the hell's going on?" When people are young, they do foolish things. So we would leave them alone and go away the other way.

Of course, everyone was stealing bicycles and using parts, and we would make our own bicycles, a front tire from this, a front tire from that, and a bicycle seat from this, and we all had our own bicycles that we used to ride around, or make our little go-carts and mess around in derby-cars that we would push off of hills.

ESPINO

Can I get back to the way that your mother raised you and your sisters, and ask you if your sisters ever rebelled against that kind of discipline, if they ever would say, "Oh, look at Joe, he gets to do this, but I have to—," that kind of thing?

RAZO

No. My father was pretty strict, and I didn't get away with anything when my father was there. It was when my father wasn't there, and my father worked very long hours. He was gone before I got up in the morning, and he came usually when I was already asleep. It was those in-between times. My brother also hung out with my same friends and with his own friends, but later on my brother wound up going to prison.

When I went to high school is when my life started changing. I went to Garfield High School rather than to Roosevelt, although I could have gone to either one. When I went to Garfield High School, I decided, "Well, you know, I don't know what the heck I want to do with my

life," so I joined the ROTC. The ROTC at that time had just finished becoming mandatory. Prior to a couple of years, everyone had to go through ROTC training, and that was because of the Korean War. You get to wear a uniform and shine your brass and spit-shine your shoes, and you get to wear your little cap. Now it's looked upon as only the nerds join ROTC, but at that time, many of us were in ROTC. We had to spit-shine our shoes and stand for drills, and they'd inspect you to make sure that you had a good haircut. My father was one that cut my hair with a bowl and leave the sideburns on that kind of stuff. That's where I learned at least some semblance of discipline.

I couldn't join the rifle team because of the fact that we couldn't afford to pay for ammunition where they practice. Then I couldn't join the Aeronautics Club, which Garfield had, to learn to be a pilot, because eventually you wind up piloting planes and so forth, Piper Cubs and so forth. We didn't have the money to do that. So I joined the drill team, which you throw up rifles and you do all sorts of fancy tricks with them, and I joined that and I had no problem. I was selected to join that.

At the same time, ROTC met the requirements of physical education class, so I couldn't sign up for any other sporting events, and I chose to sign up for football, but it would have to be after sixth period, after school. I would come out and practice with the football team, and I made the football team on the B. At that time, you had the varsity and you had the Bs. The little guys were the Bs, you weighed 112 pounds, 118 pounds, and the bigger ones were the varsity. So I joined that and went through all the drills, and that was good for me in terms of I hooked up with a couple of the guys that were seniors, and they taught me a few tricks on the field. I would look at them, and they had a good demeanor, never got involved into any personal hassles. They were just tough and showed you how to be tough on the field, Frank Trifiletti and those type of guys, and basically they were Güeros, Larry Weis.

I went out for football. My classmates and I decided—at that time you had an option of either signing up for vocational classes, they called it Industrial Arts, to be a carpenter, a machinist, etc. And I said, "No, I have aspirations of going to college." So I signed up for academic classes, and they put me in again with different kids, and a good group of kids, both males and females, that became part of my in-group, and they became my role models, my own classmates, the Dodies, the Bonnies.

We had a mixture there. We had a mixture of Armenian kids, Latinos, many whites, Asians, a few Asians, because when I was growing up during school, including elementary school, that I noticed that the Tanakas were my neighbors, Poky Tanaka and Margaret Tanaka. They were just elementary kids like me, but they always seemed to be—their parents didn't really let them out at night, and they didn't mix too much with the neighborhoods, but I was able to relate to them.

Unbeknownst to me at that early age, they had just come out of the concentration camps for the Japanese and had lost everything that they had before, so they lived in an impoverished community like the rest of them. But many of the kids went to school with me, and so I knew them and would wave to them. Margaret Tanaka went to Garfield, too, and she was in my classes. We would speak to each other at the classes.

Since I was a jock, then I started hanging around with guys that were gymnasts, basketball players, football players, and became sort of like a clique. Many of those kids were kids were the school leaders, were future leaders of the school, the student body presidents, the vice presidents, and so forth. They started inviting me to, hey, join the Kiwanis Club. Well, the first thing I would ask is, “How much does it cost?”

“Nothing.” So I would, and as part of the Kiwanis Club, then you provide services to the school, and you get your pin and recognition, and you get your Kiwanis emblem.

ESPINO

It sounds like an overnight change from when you’re a gun-carrying guy looking for fights.

RAZO

Not really. I was in between many, many different groups, trying to find my way. There were some of the kids over at Dangler that were involved in the same neighborhood that were close friends of mine, and they also stayed away from that kind of stuff. Yes, every once in a while they would do something stupid, but not too often. I was more involved in seeking out the adventure and seeing whether this was the lifestyle for me or not.

But, yes, in high school was where I met many, many stable kids, although there were still many who also transferred with me from my old middle school, were still, “Junie, what’s happening? Come on, babe, and let’s go up to the auditorium. I’ve got some yesca, and let’s try it.” I tried it once, and I took a couple of puffs, and I was never a cigarette smoker, so didn’t do anything for me. But they got high, and they thought it was cute, and I just said, “Hey, you know, I’m beyond that type of stuff.”

ESPINO

Do you ever reflect back and think why, considering your upbringing and considering the violence that you witnessed, the poverty that you witnessed, do you ever think about what was different, like how your path went in a more stable direction?

RAZO

And my brother’s didn’t.

ESPINO

Yes, or the whole generation didn’t.

RAZO

Oh, yes, oh, absolutely, absolutely. I’ve analyzed it, and I know why, and it’s the friendships and the role models. Many of my friends would also invite me to their house, and many of them were in the same boat as I was or worse. They’d live in the heart of the

projects, the Maravilla projects, and at that time, the Maravilla projects was Cochinada y media, and their fathers were drunks, and families with three generations living under one roof, packed together.

Eventually, some of these kids like me went on to college, or dropped out, became drunks like their fathers, and eventually they had to reconcile and married and had kids, and finally the family got rid of them, and they had to reconcile with the family and go through that. It's the environment and the upbringing. It wasn't that I didn't go through some of that, because I experimented with a lot of that, and I found out, one, I can't handle drink. Usually if you come from an alcoholic family, you have an alcoholic gene or a precursor that leads you to that way where you're affected more by alcohol than anything else. You learn as you get older, hey, I've got to stay away from alcohol, or I've got to take it in moderation. The problem is, is that you don't know what moderation is, and so you try and just take one drink and that's it and no more, or before you know it, you're going down the same way as your father, and before you know it, two or three drinks, and it hits you a lot harder than other people. That's something my brother didn't learn.

When I was going through school, the second year, I decided I would go out for track, and when I went out for track, I excelled on it, made All City and got the recognition. A lot of the gals would come up to me and sort of approach me, and "Let's go to the Sadie Hawkins dance" and that type of thing. Of course, I couldn't take them because I had no money. Not only that, you didn't want to enter into a boy-girlfriend relationship, although you wanted to, but could not because of the poverty and because of being embarrassed to bring them into your house, which didn't meet the same standards as where they came from, or having meet your alcoholic father. That's a typical psychological trait that many children that come from alcoholic parents exhibit is, shame.

ESPINO

I was going to say, were you ashamed of your family?

RAZO

Shame, absolutely.

ESPINO

Of your whole family, of your whole—

RAZO

No, just my father. But also in all my elementary, middle school, and high school age, I never invited any of my friends into my house. [cries] It's a catharsis, you deal with it, and that's life. You never get over it, but you deal with it.

ESPINO

It seems like, and maybe if we talk about your raising your own child, what did you see as change as far as material things, because it seems like you had some wonderful

experiences being innovative, using your creativity, making something out of nothing, and all these wonderful things that you get when you come from poverty or from the working class, you have to use your mind in ways that people who have everything don't have to.

RAZO

Yes, but that poverty never really leaves you, regardless of how many—even my psychology background with group therapy and doing counseling with people, it surfaces every now and then, and it's always a painful experience, but you go through it. That's just part and parcel of life. That's why when I went through high school and I had those kind of experiences, and you go to reunions, high school reunions, and someone comes up to you, "Joe, you were my crush in high school," I said, "God, and you know what? You were my crush in high school too."

"Well, how come you never approached me, Joe?"

And you're speechless. You don't want to open up the whole can of worms, and you just say, "Well, you know how I was when we were growing up and we were kids and so forth," but it was because of the poverty, the shame, and so forth. Or the prom's coming up, and girls would ask me to go to the prom. And you kept saying, "Well, I have a slight pull in my muscle from the running, and I really don't want to." You're always making some damn excuse to avoid that. It doesn't mean that—and I don't remember. Well, maybe I had a couple of dates when I was in high school, and I could have dated every day because I was popular and I was a star athlete in school, but you just don't because of your background. So that's depriving, and you said, "Don't I wish things would have been different now," but that's the way it was.

When your classmates invite you into their homes and you see their middle-class parents and their middle-class values and the standard of living that they have, and this was in high school, you say, "I wish I had that, and that's something that I'm going to attain when I grow up and go to college." So that's always—you know.

Running teaches you to be a competitor and to have endurance and perseverance, and what I've learned in running has been instrumental throughout my life. You don't have to be bright to get a college education. All you have to do is persevere. If you keep trying against all odds and eating your popcorn and your [Spanish word] and keep that belly from rumbling, and your chili, you will persevere. You will start with your Cs, and you keep studying and studying, eventually those Cs turn into Bs and those Bs turn into As, and before, look at it, you're a scholar, or people think you're a scholar. You're really not any brighter than you were before, but what you're willing to do is out-work people, and that's the one thing I've always been able to do in my life. I will spend whatever time is necessary to achieve whatever goal I feel is reachable and that I'm interested in and reach that goal, and that's the way my success has come.

ESPINO

But how did you first come to the idea of college?

RAZO

Many of my schoolmates that were in high school, they were, “Hey, Joe, I’m going to the library for this school project. Do you want to join me?”

“Oh, okay, I’ll go join you.” Well, that means you have to walk about five or six miles to go to the library that they’re going to.

ESPINO

The Central Library.

RAZO

Yes. Well, or way down on the other side of Whittier Boulevard where they lived, and I lived over here in East L.A. “How are you getting home?”

“Oh, I’m taking the bus.” Well, you’re not taking the bus; you’re walking home. But you start identifying with them.

Or you go to Eddie Zapanta’s house. He lived over here right across East L.A. College, and his brother Dick Zapanta, and their mothers would say, “I don’t want you to play football, Ed. I want you to study. Play tennis. That’s a gentleman’s game.” Or she would say to her son Dick, I spent some time at their home, “I know Joe has taught you how to run. You’ve won a couple of medals here at Park and Recreation, but I really don’t want you spending a lot of time in cross country. I want you hitting the books.”

My group of kids would go to the football games, because I played football, and sometimes the guys would give me rides back home, and we would pass by Eddie’s house, and the light in his bedroom was on, no matter what time we passed by. And we knew that Ed was studying and that Dickie, who was a year younger than Ed, was studying.

Those guys when I went to their homes, again, it’s all middle-class. One time—and I had never been hunting in my life, and Mr. Zapanta said, “Hey, Joe, go hunting with us?”

“Hunting? What are you guys going to shoot?”

“Rabbit.”

“Oh, okay. What I need to bring?”

"Well, we have all the shotguns and the guns."

There were going to be about seven or eight of us, and one of them was also Al Zapanta. Al later on became the GOP candidate for Congress, and Ed Zapanta became a neurosurgeon, and Dick Zapanta became an orthopedic surgeon. I saw what they were going after, and I wanted it.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

Yes. [cries] Those role models, you know.

ESPINO

Yes.

RAZO

You get hungry.

ESPINO

Sure.

RAZO

You see what they have, and you say—and the parents—

ESPINO

Did it make it different because you were Latino, they were Mexican? I'm assuming they were Mexican Americans.

RAZO

I think they were probably a mixture of Mexican along with Filipino. But their parents, Al Zapanta's father was a detective.

ESPINO

In the L.A. police force?

RAZO

Yes. He was one that broke the color barrier in Monterey Park. They wouldn't sell to Mexicans, and he went in there and he bought a home. He said, "Hell with you guys. I'm moving in." Dick and Ed Zapanta's father was a garage mechanic, and I don't think the

mother was working. Her whole deal was “my kids” and “I to spend time with them”.

They invited me and I went on a hunting trip with them. We had to buy the ammunition. Then they would say, “Okay, Joe.” After a day and a half, two days there of going hunting, they showed me how to shoot and the safety stuff over in—and they said, “We’ll drive you home.”

Of course, I said, “No. I live close by. I’ll walk home.” Well, of course, the shame, and so I walked home.

“Well, it’s late at night.”

“That’s okay. No problem. I know my way around here pretty well.”

These are the kids I hung around through high school, and these were the kids that were instrumental in my life. When I graduated from high school, I was still living in the same type of situation, although I knew I could have gotten a running scholarship to college. I didn’t have the grades. Duke University was interested in me, and I was a “C” student type of thing and maybe “B-minus” type of student.

I said, “Okay. I’m going to join the air force.”

My buddies said, “We’re going in with you.” Two Güeritos, Wayne Dean, and Kenny Shute, who was my best buddy, said, “We’re joining with you.”

I said, “Why are you guys joining?” I didn’t say, “You guys come from middle-class families,” but I kept wondering, “Why the hell are these guys joining?”

Paul said, “No, I think I’m going to opt out and go for the army because I’ll only have to spend three years rather than four years.”

We said, “Well, you know, you join the air force, at the same time that you’re qualifying for the G.I. Bill. You qualify for the G.I. Bill, which means they will pay you your college tuition for every year that you’re in, they’ll pay you for one year. If you have a family, they also give you some stipend for living expenses.” That’s what I was after. I knew I couldn’t make it at home, and I didn’t want to be in that environment and go to East L.A. College or try to get into Cal State L.A. and live in that environment. I needed to get out from that environment, and so that’s what I did. We joined the service one month or two weeks after we graduated, and went into Parks Air Force Base here in California.

ESPINO

Do you have to take a test to get into the air force?

RAZO

Yes, yes. Yes, I had no trouble passing it. But when you're in there, too, later on they test you for what vocational field they're going to place you in. Kenny and Wayne Dean, after we finished—and because of my ROTC background, I had no problems with going through basics. Later on, when I took the test, they qualified for higher up. They were bright kids, and so they qualified to become tower operators, which means they get in the tower and they give the instructions for all the planes to land. Well, I qualified for either communications, crypto, the coded signature language type of thing, or for teletype, radio, all that type of stuff, or to be a cook, or to be a military police. I said, "I don't see too much of career in being a military police or being a cook." So I said, "Okay, I'll opt out for communications," and I'm glad I did.

My buddies went to Mississippi, Biloxi, Mississippi, and I kept in touch with them, and I went to Wyoming, which was full of snow. We went to night school then, and I excelled in the field that I was in. Eventually they shipped me over to Tennessee, and I still kept in touch, writing to the Dodie and some of my old flames that I knew in college, and they kept in touch with us.

When I was in Tennessee, I said, "Okay, I am still going to pursue college." They had correspondence classes in which you signed up and you read the book, you do a test, you send it in, they correct it, give you leads and so forth, and you get college credit for it from University of Maryland.

Then I said, "No, I want to go to regular college, and I'm only spending eight hours here on the base." Sometimes I would work midnight shift, sometimes the day shift, and sometimes the swing shift, which would be from four p.m. to eight p.m. I would say, "Well, what I could do is use that time to go to college." So when I was in Tennessee, I would get on the highway, stick out my finger, and hitchhike to the nearest college and sign up for classes, and I started taking college classes there.

ESPINO

So you were hungry for learning.

RAZO

I was hungry for learning, yes.

ESPINO

What did you take first? What did you decide to take first?

RAZO

Psychology and—well, you take the basics first. You have to take English, history.

ESPINO

So when you started taking night—this is like night classes kind of thing, or was it day?

RAZO

No. I started volunteering to do the midnight shift and trade with other guys so that I could go to school during the day.

ESPINO

Then you had planned to receive some sort of—you were working toward something. It wasn't just random classes you were taking?

RAZO

Well, first I knew that it was just going to be general requirements, but psychology always interested me, and the teacher there, since I was getting good grades, encouraged me to become a history professor. But at the same time that I was there, I joined the track club for the college and ran track. Since many of the kids were farm boys, then I would get bedding from the base, abajo de alas, and take it to them and say, "Hey, here's some sheets, guys."

So I got in, and I would give them sheets for their bedding, and, you know, and sabanas and stuff like that that I took from the base and give it to them, and so I got in good with the athletes there. So anytime there was a bed available, they would say, "Hey, don't go back to the base, Joe." Thank god, because we had a number you worked something like nine days and then you get three days off. So I would stay at the college. So I was enjoying college life while at the same time—

ESPINO

You were a soldier.

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

That's so interesting.

RAZO

It was a real good, good life. Then I got shipped overseas.

ESPINO

That would be in—

RAZO

Greenland.

ESPINO

—fifty—

RAZO

Oh, let's see. I joined in 1956, so I think I was in Tennessee probably for about a year, a year and a half. By '58, they were sending me to Newfoundland, because in communications there is always a communications satellite or radio station or crypto or teletype station, and I was doing a lot of teletype. So you were getting many secret messages, and you don't decode them. That was a crypto section. But you knew what was going on in the world, and what was going on with the Osama Bin Ladens, that's been going on since life began, because we had rolls and rolls of paper in English that were being decoded, and you could go out there and you could see that agent so-and-so was just killed and that so-and-so rebels were doing this in this country, and you could spend hours reading all that stuff.

ESPINO

Because it was true, it was all true. That was during the Cold War period too.

RAZO

Yes, we've been doing that for—and, of course, when I was in—was it in Tennessee? Yes. When I was in Tennessee, I also found out going to the college what discrimination was all about, and it was a segregated college.

ESPINO

I bet.

RAZO

When I went in, since I was a jock again, some of the gals were interested in me, the college coeds, or even on base. People called the base all the time. There are a lot of lonely gals out there. For whatever reason, armed forces bases always are an available pool of males, and they're at this base. So they'd call me, you'd answer the phone, and you say [unclear] or whatever it is, "Can I help you?"

And they'd say, "Oh, I like your voice."

"Okay, you like my voice. How can I help you?"

Then later on they'd say, "Okay," start a conversation with you, "I'll meet you by the gate," because they require permits to enter the gate. What they wanted to do is date you. If you don't have a car, well, great, sounds good. Some were farm girls and sometimes you don't know whether you've scored or not. Some of them get off of a car and their knuckles touch the ground and they're grunting, and you say, "Oh, man, god. What the hell have I gotten myself into?" And other times, you—

ESPINO

You win the lottery.

RAZO

Yes. [laughs] At college, I knew what I was getting into. But some of the gals would say, "Oh, would you take off your cap?"

Well, you didn't know what was going on. I'd say, "Well, maybe they want to see if I have curly hair or not." No, what they want to make sure is they see that you're not Anglo, but they don't know what to make of you. So they want to find out whether you have kinky hair or not. So that's what was behind it.

ESPINO

Or if you're African descent.

RAZO

Yes, or you're a mix. Puerto Rican [unclear] and [Spanish phrase] at that time, but later on then you start thinking, "Why the hell is she asking me to take off my cap?"

ESPINO

Wow, some other life lessons you learned.

RAZO

Yes. And you see this when you're also walking through town or dating gals, not really dating them, but they picked you up or you picked them up when I would go with some of the guys off of base and we'd go and have a couple of shots or at college. Some of the gals would come up to you, or the girlfriends of some of the athletes that you hang around with, and say, "Joe, what are you? Can you tell me what foreign country you come from?" because they think you're a foreign student, but you've gained access to their college.

ESPINO

And Razo, Razo doesn't really—you could say Razo, and it could be Italian.

RAZO

Yes, it could be anything.

ESPINO

Yes. Did you think you were passing?

RAZO

Pardon?

ESPINO

Were you passing as white?

RAZO

Well, I went to a white college, I had to be passing as white, because they didn't allow blacks there. But at the same time, they didn't know. They knew there was something strange about me, because I speak with an accent, and so they knew there was—what's happening? "So what foreign country are you from?"

I said, "California. That's where I come from."

But, again, those type of things, the impact never leaves you that you are different, and people aren't going to let you forget it. Or you go into town, whether it's Nashville or whatever, and since everything is segregated at that time, some people accept you readily because they want to have this strange experience with something different. Other people are sort of—but when you're a jock, you always have another port of entry into the real world.

ESPINO

Oh, that's fascinating.

RAZO

So it's another avenue of joining mainstream rather than just being white.

ESPINO

Absolutely.

RAZO

But there were no black athletes during the time that I went to college.

ESPINO

Because it was segregated.

RAZO

And you went to many of them, and the “N” word was constantly being used, all the time.

ESPINO

So when you would have your track meets, your competition there would be no—

RAZO

No problems.

ESPINO

—[unclear] the other school? But I mean there would be no African Americans from the other schools?

RAZO

No, no, it was all white.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

It was segregated. All the whole South was segregated, and that was before the kids were allowed into any of the colleges.

ESPINO

Jeez.

RAZO

I would hang around with an individual by the name of Jerry Hurst. He was about six-eight, and he came from California and was going to that same college. When someone asked me about what country I was from, and Jerry said, “Oh, my father is a farmer, a rancher over in California, and we have a lot of people like Joe over there.” So, I mean, even though he was from California, he was still, “Yeah, I mean, yeah, Joe’s okay. We accept him.” Hired-hand type of mentality. So apparently he had a lot of Mexicans working at his ranch.

ESPINO

Working for his family.

RAZO

Somewhere, yes. That’s just part and parcel of—

ESPINO

Those times. Well, I'm going to stop it right now. [End of February 15, 2013 interview]

1.2. Session Two (February 25, 2013)

ESPINO

This is Virginia Espino, and today is February 25. I'm interviewing Joe Razo at his home in Alhambra, California.

I want to go back to a period that we didn't cover and ask you about your experiences with World War II, because you were born in 1938 and then you came to Los Angeles around the time you were six. So did it filter into your life in any way? Did you know people who served? Did the Depression era, the economic situation—I mean, we talked about your poverty last time, but is there anything from that, from the war period, the culture of the war, impact you? Maybe Nazism?

RAZO

No, none of that really impacted me that I saw openly. I know my father had served in the navy during World War II, and that when he came back, then it was difficult to get his job, and that's the reason that we moved to California. But at that time I was too young to know what was happening. I know that my uncles had also served, and I knew that one of my uncles had avoided the war or the draft by moving across the border.

ESPINO

South?

RAZO

Yes, Tijuana, and he says, "Hell, no, I'm not going to serve," and he became a bartender over there. As far as I know, that's where he lived and died. He never really came back.

ESPINO

He never came back. That's fascinating.

RAZO

But other than that, you used to see during my early childhood the servicemen in the train that were passing by maybe three or four blocks from my house, and the trains were just loaded with servicemen.

ESPINO

Yes. You did mention that they would throw money.

RAZO

Right, yes, sometimes throw coins and so forth. We'd go over there and pick it up.

Later on, I did run into quite a number of servicemen after we had moved to California, and my father was still in Texas, and we were trying to get established and we were living with my grandmother in East L.A. My mother, for whatever reason, had to go back, probably to take care of some paperwork with my father, and we rode on the train, and I remember a lot of servicemen being on the train.

ESPINO

Do you remember how you viewed them, if you had an impression of them? Because many of the activists that I've interviewed talk about how they revered those that fought in World War II and uncles and maybe older brothers, and that was where they learned about their own patriotism to the United States. Did that have that kind of impact on you?

RAZO

None whatsoever. I think I was just too young, before age six or six, to really look into that. I don't remember much of my childhood except the dog that I had and sometimes walking with my mother on walks and so forth, and my report cards and stuff like that. All I remember is a lot of poverty, the odd houses and the projects, I guess, that we lived in, the brick buildings. But the war had no impact on me.

ESPINO

You didn't learn about the politics of Europe and the United States and then the Japanese internment, and those kinds of things? Were your parents—did they talk about politics like that at home?

RAZO

No, none whatsoever. We had no books at home, no magazines, so it wasn't like you look at the shelves and—yes, there was nothing in terms of reading. There were no bedtime stories, none, none of that. So we would turn on the radio and gather around the radio to hear the radio. Throughout my childhood I didn't grow up with literature or any of that. It only came into being when my schoolmates, when I would go to their houses when I was a senior in school that then I started seeing bookshelves, a lot of books, magazines, that I would knock on the door, and they would let me in. They would bring out some goodies, some snacks, and that some of my friends were listening to what is equivalent to 60 Minutes or 20/20, and then they're saying, "I'm doing a book report on this."

I said, "How can you take notes so quick from the television?"

And they said, "Well, you can write to the station, and the station, for $1.25," or whatever the cost is, "will send you a copy of everything that they've said. So we use that as a means of our bibliographies and so forth for annotations in our term papers." So I started learning

about some of those things. So, yes, education was not really an issue with my family.

ESPINO

How about religion? Was your mother or father—well, I'm assuming your mother, if one of your parents was involved in that?

RAZO

Well, yes, the prayers. I remember going to quite a number of neighborhood meetings where it was always the rosary, "Ave Maria," and then going through the whole [unclear] and the beating on chest and the brainwashing that went on and so forth and going to some funerals. My grandma and mother were more into that, my father was too. I would attend Mass on Sundays, and I became an altar boy at Our Lady of Soledad over on Brooklyn Avenue School and started taking lessons for first communion and then second communion.

I used to hang around the church, too, for a while, but, again, I learned by rote the catechism lessons. In terms of impact, I went through the religious phase for a while, but that was more when I went overseas to Newfoundland. There, for about a year, since I was basically in an isolated tour, there was nothing to do. There were very few women. If you could catch a polar bear, you could have sex. If not, you went without. And it was cold, about 380-something inches of snow every year. Anytime the new librarian came to base, she was usually female, she got married within two or three months because there were so many men there, and usually they chose pilots or lieutenants, captains. That was the kind of atmosphere that I was at in Newfoundland.

In addition to that, you also saw the racism overseas. Integration was just occurring in the States, as I mentioned, when I was in Tennessee, that we flew many of the troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, and some of the other places that the federal government wanted integrated. But when I was shipped overseas, then even though I was in an isolated tour, Newfoundlanders had a number of bars off base and three or four restaurants that we used to hang around when we weren't on base, and many of the whites did not want blacks to enter the bars, and so there was a lot of tension and fighting. The allegations were that the blacks were using bars of soap, putting in razorblades in the bars of soap just to where the blades would come up, and there would be fights and that they would use that during the fights. I did see a couple of airman that were cut up with superficial cuts, just nicks, nothing real serious, where no one was killed. But the tensions were there from a racial point of view.

ESPINO

Did you ever have any close relationships with the African American soldiers?

RAZO

Yes, I did, yes. We mixed freely, and since there was nothing to do, many of them were close-knit groups, and they formed their own singing groups, and you would hear them doing the bee-bop type of fifties songs and trying to harmonize. We would gamble, the dice and the card games. And just like a broad spectrum of people, some you trusted, some you

didn't. Some had crooked dice that no matter what they threw, the dice would land, and after a while, it would flip over. [laughter]

ESPINO

That's funny.

RAZO

Seven or eleven, and that was a winner. So you knew that guy was a crook, so you stayed away from him, and usually they were the sergeants that were making the military a career.

That was also my first experience with homosexuality, because a number of the blacks were gay. Once in a while they would get caught in the barracks with white airmen in a sexual act, and, you know, again, that opened up my eyes. I didn't know that was happening.

ESPINO

Did you know about homosexuality before that?

RAZO

No, no, I wasn't really exposed to it. Many of the black guys, well, two of them that I know of, were on the boxing team, because later on I joined the boxing team, and the reason I joined was not because I was a boxer, but because there were a number of boxers in my community when I was growing up, but because of the fact that I wanted a free trip to New York, and one of the tournaments was in New York. That and Greenland, so anything, I'd take a couple of blows. But, again, it was a very informal—there was really no training. There was no coach. You just put on the gloves, and sometimes at 112 pounds, here I was, sparring with a heavyweight. So that's the way you learned, you learned boxing. But Newfoundland was an experience for me in terms of the mishmash of every race, every ethnicity, from Irish, from people from Brooklyn, from Harlem, and you just dealt with it.

ESPINO

Within the military, you're saying, not in the town itself.

RAZO

No, within the military. The towns were small, and the native population were basically fishermen, cod fishermen who would go out and fish. They raised chicken, too, but their chickens, when you ate chickens, tasted like fish because the feed for the chickens were fish, so they got that fishy taste. And a lot of lobster and crab and so forth, and you got tired of eating that. The eggs were powdered, so everything was artificial and it really didn't taste good.

ESPINO

Sounds like it. Some people talk about going overseas, going to Europe, places like that,

even Japan. I interviewed one person who was in Korea. The respect they got there, that they didn't get back in the United States, did you find that? Not within the military structure, but within the community itself of Newfoundland.

RAZO

No, I found that more in Tennessee. When I was in Tennessee, there were a number of farm boys that were in the military for a career, and they would always talk—I wouldn't say negatively, but certainly they didn't seem to hold the third-world countries like Korea, Philippines and some of the areas, Japan, that they visited in high esteem. They would always talk about Mama San this and women this, and "Yeah, I had them, and they would wash our clothes in little tubs, basins, and so forth, and they would iron our clothes for x number of cents," and I helped them out with kids and would give them some food that we had from the base exchange, but it was never said as on an equal partnership. Yes, they were never held in high esteem, and I had always thought, well, I'm going to wind up serving in such a country, and I'm looking forward to it, or in Germany. In communications, they put you in every corner of the world, and usually it's more isolated tours, and that's when I found out I was going to Newfoundland, I said, "Oh, no, not Newfoundland." I mean, that's next to Greenland. There's nothing there but polar bears and snow.

ESPINO

Nature.

RAZO

And a lot of bears. Every year the bay would freeze over, and people would go out with chainsaws and cut a holes in the ice so they could go fishing. Some of the people would buy rifles and go moose hunting. But there was very little to do except drink and go to the movies and gamble on base.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

There was not much of anything, so I did a lot of that, and that's when one of the times that—many times rather than just one—that I found out that I couldn't handle drink. They used to give you forty ounces of liquor, which is a big bottle like this, and the ration for airmen was two forty ounces a month. So, of course, everyone, since there's nothing to do, you go to the base and you say, "Okay."

ESPINO

"I want my forty ounces."

RAZO

"I want my ration for that." Also I hung around with a lot of people there, and I would say that most of the people that I hung around there were whites. There were maybe four or

five Latinos, but there weren't too many of us.

ESPINO

How did they treat you?

RAZO

I had no problem with them. Since I was a boxer, I had always been in athletics one way or another, and when I was in Tennessee I was on the track team with the college, so I always had that entryway into that world without any problem, without discrimination.

In fact, I would say that in growing up, I never felt that I was discriminated against, not on an ethnic basis or on a racial basis. Where I saw the discrimination was on a class basis, and it was either you were low-class, and certainly we were in the lowest rung of the class, or you were middle-class, as some of my schoolmates were, or you were upper-class, and those were the people that you generally worked for. But I saw that more as a class war rather than an ethnic or nationality or race war. Now, I was keenly aware of the racial discrimination, but I saw the racial discrimination based really on the blacks, because I hadn't experienced it until I went to Tennessee. Then that's when I started experiencing that it was basically white against anything that was non-white or that there were different degrees of white, because at that time in the forties or fifties, Latinos, Hispanics, whatever you want to call them, were a class of white.

ESPINO

That's right.

RAZO

So we were Caucasian by the census.

ESPINO

When you enlisted in the military, did you have to give your race?

RAZO

I can't remember. I can't remember. But I know that on the census we were white. All the stuff I started reading, then I also became keenly aware of the fact that there were many shades of white, and the darker skin you were, the lower on the scale you are of whiteness. The more Hispano, Hispanic, Spanish you are, the higher you are on the scale of whiteness. The more you speak with an accent, the lower you are, as opposed to people who have no accent whatsoever. So skin color and color of your skin and also your speech had a lot to do with it.

The one thing I'm very grateful for in Newfoundland is that when I was in Newfoundland, since I was in an isolated tour, my roommate was white and he was Mormon. Of course, Mormons always tried to convert you, and so we had great discussions about the Bible. It

forced me to read the Bible and to learn a lot about Catholicism.

Then I started joining book clubs, and some of them were religious book clubs. They would send you x number of volumes a month, and, of course, you pay for them. That opened up a new world for me, and I bought a two-set large volume of dictionaries that I still have. They're heavy and, you know, have every word in them, at least at that time. When my new books would come in, and I especially had difficulty reading the Shakespeare books, comedies, histories, tragedies, because I spent half of my time in that dictionary finding out what the words are. It helped me to improve my vocabulary. I was at that time, unknown to me, becoming self-educated and learning the love of literature, of books.

ESPINO

And you credit that inspiration from your roommate, your Mormon roommate?

RAZO

No, to my high school classmates, because this is basically what opened up my eyes in their homes. But my roommate wasn't into book clubs, but he was the one that was always questioning my religion, and then we had some good, fun debates.

ESPINO

So in order to have, to hold your position—

RAZO

To defend Catholicism, right.

ESPINO

—you had to do some research.

RAZO

Do some research and go into it, and then the more I went into it, the more I found out the flaws of Catholicism, married popes, and how rich the church was, and basically that they weren't really—later on, liberation theology came in. And, of course, every damn thing was a sin. So you look, oh, evil thoughts, got to go to confession. Can't do this. And there for about a year I was going to Mass every morning on a daily basis.

ESPINO

In Tennessee?

RAZO

No, in Newfoundland.

ESPINO

So your roommate, you're talking about your roommate in Newfoundland, that's where you started to join the book club, or in Tennessee?

RAZO

No, in Newfoundland. In Tennessee I was taking correspondence classes but for college credit. So the seeds had already been laid from high school through my roommates, and then when I went to Tennessee, that's when I started taking college classes at the local university and also subscribing to correspondence classes where I would receive college credits from the University of Maryland.

ESPINO

Were you on a path to a degree, or were you taking random classes?

RAZO

No, I think I was on a path to a degree, and psychology had always interested me, the understanding of the human behavior. But I had not sat down with any counselor and said, "This is where I'm going," and I didn't take any of the requirements like English and so forth. I was taking basically the classes that I felt I needed. Even when I went to college in Tennessee, I never sat down with a counselor. I just started taking some of the classes, like history and math classes and stuff like that, that I thought were the basics, and corresponding by mail with some of my friends who were in college here, were part of my high school group. I got an inkling as to what classes I needed to take, and when I landed in Newfoundland, that just opened up my eyes to literature, to the book clubs.

Eventually when I was in Newfoundland, I attained the rank of buck sergeant type of thing, and then I was put in charge of monitoring the activities for the group of airmen that I had in communications and making sure that the messages they were sending out were done properly and no typographical errors, and reading all the teletypes and with little holes in it. You have a little tape and each little perforation means something. So I would go out there, and we started on an efficiency rating for them as to how many mistakes they made on a weekly and monthly basis and bringing them in and giving them some training so that they could become more proficient.

At that time, too, I started going into the crypto room, where they do a lot of the encrypting of secret messages, intelligence messages, and many of those were encrypted into the English language, and there were just rolls and rolls of almost like butcher paper and put in English. Sometimes I would spend hours reading what was happening in the world, what rebel group was doing what to whom, the revolution that was going on, communist agents and so forth, so a lot of things politically were opening up to me, and I became very interested into world affairs.

ESPINO

How would you describe your politics or your patriotism before you joined the military and then during this period that you're talking about?

RAZO

I think I was very patriotic, but patriotism really didn't play a role when I was in high school. My Japanese friends in high school never spoke about internment, and I was not aware of internment when I was going through high school. All I know is that all my Asian friends—and there were very few Chinese, they were mostly Japanese American, and they were just very low key and very humble, and I can understand why now. They were behind the curtain, and they really did not want to be seen, and they really didn't assume any great leadership positions in school or even in college. It was like, "We've just been locked up, and we're going to play it low-profile. We lost our businesses and we lost our homes, and so now we're just going to melt into the woodwork and concentrate on education." I can understand their reluctance to get involved, and it wasn't until later when I joined the movement that I became aware of what really had happened and started researching and reading about it.

ESPINO

You didn't know about that history?

RAZO

No, no, no, didn't know about that. All I remember is before when I was in high school, we did receive the L.A. Times, picking it up, and I was always reading the Times because that was the only literature that we had. So I was cognizant of what was happening in the world, and I remember that the Korean War had broken out in 1953, I believe, and that's just about the time that I was graduating from middle school to senior school, and I became enthused about what they had happening around the world rather than just my immediate barrio.

I didn't see anyone in the neighborhood joining up, and so, again, everything was low key. It sort of goes back to now I can relate to it, to my psychology background, in what they call Maslow's hierarchy theory, and it's sort of like a pyramid. On that pyramid, on the bottom scale, your immediate needs are food, clothing, and shelter. As you go up that pyramid, then you start getting other needs: entertainment, education. And eventually you read the top peak in which you know what your self-worth is. But you are not too busy dealing with the higher peaks of self-worth and education when you're too busy trying to survive. So I was still at the primitive scale of food, clothing, and shelter to worry much about all the rest. Those are things that came later, and those are the principles that I also used in organizing when I joined the Chicano Movement.

ESPINO

When you were in Tennessee, you were taking basically your general education, history?

RAZO

Right, the prerequisites type of thing.

ESPINO

Then psychology, you mentioned that that was something that you were really drawn to.

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

Was there anything else that you—

RAZO

Well, I think I took history, and since I was on base, I couldn't carry a full load, so I only had to take six, maybe nine units at the most, and just read about a lot of the other stuff through correspondence classes. So I was too busy with my duties on base and trying to be a student at the same time. When I was in Newfoundland, of course, I didn't have access to college.

ESPINO

To that kind of learning.

RAZO

Yes, right.

ESPINO

You mentioned that it was during the time of segregation, and so you didn't come across any African Americans at the university in Tennessee.

RAZO

No, none.

ESPINO

Did you ever think about where you fit as far as you're not necessarily of European ancestry and you're not African either?

RAZO

I mentioned it in the last talk, and I mentioned the fact that a number of students came up to me and they wanted to know whether I was a foreign student or not, and what country I had immigrated from to attend their college. Or the gal that asked me to take off my airman's cap to see whether or not I had kinky hair or not. So that had an impact on me, but I still had very much access to that university, again not because of my skin color or my speech, but because I was an athlete.

So I had to be taking a full load, or at least twelve units, otherwise I would not have qualified to run for that college. So you can't just take one class and qualify to be an athlete, so I must have been taking at least twelve units. But being an athlete, I had access to the groups, although I did not live on campus. I was still away and being a commuter to the college. So I didn't spend too much time in the college sense. Most of the time that I spent was on base.

ESPINO

You didn't come to your identity as Chicano until much, much later—

RAZO

Much later.

ESPINO

—because I think you did mention that you were passing, not willingly or knowing, but people assumed you were white.

RAZO

I think so, because I have a shallow type of skin.

ESPINO

And have light eyes? I can't really see with your sunglasses.

RAZO

No, I have brown eyes. I had no problem with women. Like I said, there are a lot of lonely women near airbases, and they're always calling and wanting to date, so that that wasn't a problem. Transportation was a problem until I bought a car, and then by that time, as soon as I bought a car, then they shipped me out overseas so I had to get rid of the car because where are you going to drive in the snow over there?

ESPINO

Do you think it would have been different for you had you had different color skin, had your skin been darker? Do you think your experience would have been different?

RAZO

I think so. I think so, maybe at the university, but not in having access to women. Like I said, there's a lot of lonely gals in every shape, form, whatsoever near all these army and naval and air force bases. They seem to flock and congregate around it, and many of them, I would say, are uneducated women. You're not getting the cream of the crop. You're getting someone who maybe dropped out of high school or someone that went to high school but is working on a farm or farmer's daughters type of thing or the gals that you can pick up at the bar, the type of barhopping type of stuff.

ESPINO

You never fell in love in Tennessee?

RAZO

No, never. I was more infatuated with a gal in high school, but because of my economic situation, I never expressed any interest. I had quite a number of gals that asked me to the Sadie Hawkins type of dances and so forth, and I would always make some excuse; pulled muscle from running. It wasn't that I didn't want to go; it was just economics. I didn't have access to a car. My father was not driving at that time. And once you do that, you start having a girlfriend, and what do you do? When it's her birthday, how are you going to get the money for a birthday gift? There was one gal, Dodie Vigil, and she was Latina, but she more [unclear] middle-class. I went to her house one time as a group, with guys and gals that hung together, and saw what she lived in. I said, "Boy, nice middle-class home."

We used to greet each other, and, lo and behold, a number of years ago, we went to a reunion, and she came up and she says, "Boy, I always had a crush on you," and so forth, and our crushes just went—"How come you never told me?" Well, I had no answer for her. I didn't want to go through my whole catharsis and tell her about poverty and all that deal. And she was one that I communicated with when I was in the air force for a couple of years. We wrote back to each other. She went on to become a teacher. She went to Cal State Long Beach and became a teacher and taught the gifted children, and happily married. She's a very stable woman, very stable, never had an ill word to say about anyone. Just nice. Niceness really appealed to me, just nice gal, just the one you want to say, "I want you to be the mother of my children," type of thing, and that's why I also married my wife, the same type of appeal.

After I left Newfoundland and mustered out of the air force, then I decided that I would take a bus rather than fly from New York to California to come home. They asked me if I wanted to stay in the active reserves in the air force, and I said no. The day I was discharged, I got rid of every piece of air force clothing I had, sold it. I had put in my four years, and four years were long enough, because I was seeing what was on the other side, and I said, "I want some of that. That's where my life is going to be directed at, not the army, not the navy, not the air force."

When I was in high school, too, surprisingly, when I was a junior or a senior, I joined the Marine Corps reserves, and they had a unit here in Pico Rivera, and we drove tanks, and so I was a tanker for a while. We would go about once a month and they would take us on dry runs. I remember going through riverbeds and dusty as heck. But I never joined the Marine Corps because all they do is teach you how to kill. So that's why I joined the air force. They teach you a trade and it's more technical than that.

But my orientation was still going towards the armed forces, but when I got out, I had had my fill. I had seen the disparity and the different treatment that was used, and I wasn't cognizant of whether it was based on ethnicity or race or whether it was just office politics, but many times you score in the top rank for promotions, but I saw that many times

someone of white ancestry, Anglo ancestry was being promoted over minorities.

Even in one instance where that individual was promoted over me had just been caught two weeks before in a homosexual relationship, and the M.P.'s, military police, caught him in the barracks, and that didn't seem to matter. So that's when they said, "Joe, we want you to re-up, because we know by the end of this year your enlistment is going to be up, and you've got the makings."

And I said, "Not for me. I've got my goals, and the armed forces is not."

"Boy, you can really make it, and I'm sure we'll promote you on this next promotion."

And I said, "Nope."

ESPINO

Experiencing that homosexuality, was that something that made you look at the military differently?

RAZO

No, because like two of the guys that were homosexuals were also on the boxing team with me, and they were good fighters too. Boy, one guy really had a good jab. Every fight he got into, the other guy came out with a big ball on his face from his jab striking. We talked to each other. But I just felt that that was a dead end for me. I used to babysit for some of the sergeants that were in my unit, and they had their family there even though it was a isolated tour. There were a number of people that were married, and they trusted me with their kids, three or four years old, and say, "Joe, we want to go to the NCO Club. Would you babysit?"

"Sure." So I'd go over and babysit for them while they went nightclubbing, what they'd call—there'd be a dance at the NCO Club. I said to myself, "Is this what I want when I get married, as a family, base to base, station-to-station hopping?" I didn't like so much the military discipline or short haircuts all the time, buzz cuts, and polishing your brass, and spit-shining shoes. I learned a lot, the punctuality, the making of your bed in four corners to where your sheets and blankets are spread in such a way that you'd better be able to bounce a quarter of fit, because if you don't, if you're sloppy on it, you're going to get demerits and you're going to be forced to make it up again. So your barracks is not going to come out on top, and coming up on top meant that you might get liberty off of the base. If your barracks was dirty, I mean, they go everything, and we went through the whole thing of going with toothbrushes on the corners and sweeping all the dirt and buffing the floors with blankets and buffers and wax. You learn some discipline in there. I also learned that some people couldn't take discipline, and those ones usually wound up not only in trouble on base but off of the base, and they would get dishonorable discharges or wind up in the stockade.

ESPINO

You didn't want that either.

RAZO

Yes, well, you want to balance, but at the same time say no, and the spit-shine, and I had gone through that in high school for the first year when I went through ROTC. So I said, "That's not what I want to do with my life." I knew I wanted to go to college because of the people I hung around with, and what books meant to me.

So when I came out, I came home, and by that time—even before then, when I was in Tennessee, I came home on leave before I was shipped out overseas. When I came home, my parents informed me that my brother had been arrested and that he and two others that he started to hang around with, that he had dropped out of school.

ESPINO

High school?

RAZO

Yes, as a junior, and started hanging around with a couple of cons, not in the neighborhood, but that he knew, because that was the type of group of people that— [interruption]

ESPINO

Okay, we're back.

RAZO

So when I came home, my parents made me aware that my brother had been arrested, and apparently he and two others, one of which used to be an ex-employee of a supermarket, decided that they were going to rob the supermarket. According to them, my brother had found a shotgun that was buried somewhere—at least that was the story—and since he was very handy with his tools and his hands, he fixed it and oiled it.

They went in there, and they went to a car salesman and said that they wanted to buy a car. The car salesman gave them the car and apparently didn't accompany them. I don't know quite how the story came about that he didn't accompany them, but they used that car and they went in, and my brother had the shotgun, and they robbed the supermarket.

Well, some of the other clerks recognized, even though they were disguised and had bandannas or whatever it is they had, recognized one of the guys as being an ex-employee. Lo and behold, they were picked up. The way they found my brother is that they just went to the neighborhood because they didn't know where he lived, just asking the little kids around the neighborhood whether they knew someone named "Kiki." Of course, everyone had a nickname.

So they pointed to our house, and they came in. At that time, there was no such thing as a search warrant. They just busted in, and they also tried that when I was there. So they had trouble with me, because my brother had not told them where he had hid the money. So he was in when I was there, and so after having a heated discussion with a couple of the detectives, I got to my brother behind bars, and he coughed up as to where he had hidden the money, and we turned over the money. There was really very little

ESPINO

Did that reduce his sentence, returning the money?

RAZO

I really don't know.

ESPINO

That wasn't part of the negotiation?

RAZO

No, there was no deal worked out, and we weren't aware of lawyers and all that kind of stuff. Even if we had been was aware, they couldn't afford it at that time.

ESPINO

This probably seems like a dumb question, but why would you give them the money back?

RAZO

Well, the one thing that, in spite of everything that had occurred in the neighborhood, the one thing that we had were ethics. We don't steal. You don't steal from your neighbor. You don't steal from your family. That, to me, has always been a no-no. Maybe that was through the religious upbringing, but that was a personal ethic that everyone in the family, except maybe my father, who knows, but followed. I mean, that's equivalent to murder for us. There's a shame that is instilled and levied upon the family.

ESPINO

Do you remember how you convinced your brother to cough up the location?

RAZO

I just told him that every time they came in, the family was in turmoil, and my mother was crying and the sisters and so forth, and what the hell was he thinking of? When I left him, at least he was following in my footsteps, trying to make the cross-country team. The fact was that I should have kept a closer eye on him and brought him into my group, or at least a better group that he started hanging around with. But I was also aware of the fact that things were as chaotic as before in terms of the poverty and the drunkenness. I just saw

him as trying to find his way and falling victim, like many of the people in the neighborhood were doing, with the kind of people that he hung around with. But I wasn't aware, and my family never made me aware, that he was doing this or even that he had dropped out of school. They just didn't communicate anything negative to me when I was in the air force.

ESPINO

You were in touch with them? You were writing letters back and forth?

RAZO

Oh, yes, yes, and sending money, too, yes, help them out in whichever way I could and also hoping that some of that money could be saved so that when I came out, I could go on to college, although I knew that I qualified for four years of the G.I. Bill. That was one of my primary interests in joining, because I knew that for every year you served, you got one year of college tuition at a certain level and some living expense money paid for it too.

ESPINO

Did you feel guilty that you had left your brother when that happened?

RAZO

No, not really. I was learning that sometimes you have to save yourself, and sometimes it has to be at the expense of the family. That was part of the psychology that I was reading through the classes I was taking, that sometimes it's the family that brings you down, not you. It's not because you don't have the motivation or the perception, but anytime someone in the family starts making it, then people say, "Help me out here, help me out there, help me out," and before you know it, you're so busy helping out everyone that you're not helping yourself, and the end goals that you have set for yourself are never reached.

I saw that with many of my neighbors who were trying to better themselves, and all of a sudden, Daddy or Mama says, "We need your help to help support the family." So in supporting the family, you never make it out, you never make it out of the barrio or the ghetto or out of poverty. Some people are very bright, very bright, but due to their sacrifice, they're never able to achieve their goal.

ESPINO

Did you ask your parents' permission or did you hope to get their blessing when you enlisted?

RAZO

No, no.

ESPINO

What did they say when you told them you were leaving?

RAZO

Well, I was seventeen, so I need their permission because I was not eighteen. I didn't turn eighteen about three or four months later when I enlisted. I just told them that's where I wanted to go. I couldn't afford college, and I wanted to be on my own, and I wanted to see the world and also to learn a trade just in case things didn't work out for me.

ESPINO

What did they say?

RAZO

You know, no problem.

ESPINO

No guilt, no—

RAZO

No, no guilt, no nothing.

ESPINO

—"Don't go. Don't leave"?

RAZO

No, no.

ESPINO

"We need you"?

RAZO

"We want you to—."

ESPINO

That's nice. [laughs]

RAZO

I mean, they, again, were dealing with Maslow's triangle hierarchy of food, shelter, and clothing, and not high, lofty goals, so, yes, it was okay. Yes, yes. "Where do we sign?"

I went in, and even the day that I was getting on the bus, I kept thinking, "Man, am I doing

the right thing?" I kept saying, "Yes, I'm doing the right thing, because eventually I'm going to be on my own," and I needed to be on my own in order to reach the goals I had set for myself.

When I came out, out of the service, then I moved back into the home, because by then my sisters had both graduated, and they were older sisters, had graduated from high school, and they knew what was happening in the home. They made a conscious decision to move out of the neighborhood. So they invested in a home in Montebello, along with the help of my mother, who was a seamstress working in the garment industry, which pays you slave plantation type of wages, and if you're lucky when you retire in fifty years, they'll give you a gold watch.

But they combined all their earnings and then they bought a house, or a down payment for a house in Montebello, so that when my brother came out of prison, he would be in a better environment, rather than in the local neighborhood and wind up serving life. So when I came out, that's where I moved into, into Montebello.

ESPINO

To your sisters'?

RAZO

One of my sisters had married. The other one was still there for about a year and a half to two years after a while. My father was still doing the gardening and the handiwork and the drinking. I lived there for about a year, a year and a half, and enrolled at East L.A. College, and went out for track and cross country. Again, my background, I excelled in it and was able to wheel and deal. I had no transportation because the money that I had been sending home was used to take care of immediate needs for the family. I did not want to use my G.I. Bill, and so I went through school on a dime, hook and crook, part-time jobs that I would get, because I always thought that those four years of G.I. Bill I wanted to save when I got my Ph.D.

ESPINO

You knew that even—

RAZO

I knew that at that time.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

So I said, "I'm not going to blow it as an undergrad." I had my goals.

ESPINO

You didn't have anybody advising you or giving you counsel?

RAZO

No, no, no one whatsoever.

ESPINO

Incredible.

RAZO

I kept looking at what my classmates had had, and I said, "I want that." I struggled and would go take classes, and sometimes the classes didn't end till night because I was working part-time, and I would miss the bus coming home, and the buses didn't run after ten o'clock. But fortunately for me, since I was a runner, then I would be able to run from East L.A. College to home to Montebello, and I did that for a number of years.

I would work in clothing stores downtown and was able to buy my clothing cheap, at cost, and at the same time take classes at night. When I would get the bus going to class, I would tell someone on the bus, "Would you wake me up when we get to East L.A. College?" and catch some shuteye there, and go and get out and hope to God that the individual would let us out on time, usually nine-fifty rather than ten o'clock so I could catch the bus.

I continued to compete, and competing and being in athletics is something that lays a real strong foundation in your life. One, you learn you have to compete. You're competing in races all the time, and you quickly use that analogy that you have to compete in life, whether it's in education or whether it's going for a job. You have to be able to interview. You have to get through the front door, and so therefore that means that you have to have the proper education to even have that door open to you. Otherwise, if you don't have the education, how are you going to compete? You've never met the prerequisite for competition.

Then, too, that you have to have perseverance, you have to have the endurance, and that you learn through competition, through running. When you're tired, when you're working out, when you're hungry, you'd rather go eat, although there might not be food, than to train. But to become a good runner, you have to train harder than the other individual, and so I was very goal oriented toward that.

I used those lessons of competition, perseverance, endurance, and those were the same goals that I followed in class, because I wasn't one of the brightest guys. When I came in, I didn't have the tools. It was something that I had to learn by myself. We didn't have orientation classes that recruited Chicanos and say, "Okay, the Camp Hess, like UCLA, this is what you need to succeed." This is something that you had to learn on your own, and you learned by your Cs and keep it up, keep it up, and then you make that breakthrough and

you go into the Bs, and you keep it up and keep it up and keep trying and studying, and then you go into the As. Once you reach that platform, you want to stay there, and, yes, I learned that I could outwork people and reach those type of levels. So those lessons from athletics were just the basis of my life.

While going through there, I was taking, of course, psychology classes and having to deal with the problems at home, because my father was still drinking. I went to a psychologist there at East L.A. College, really not a counselor, because they don't do too much counseling, but she was one that basically said, "Joe, it's a little—," and by that time we had had a younger sister that had joined the family, and she was about eight or ten, and I was reluctant. I wanted to move away from home, but I was reluctant because I was stability enough for the family. That's when at that time she made me aware of, you know, you're there and you're going to be lost. So you move. [cries] You sacrifice the sister, but you move. So I got out.

ESPINO

She was your mom's—

RAZO

My younger sister.

ESPINO

So your mom had a baby late in life?

RAZO

Yes, when I was in the air force.

ESPINO

You didn't want to leave her, but you had to.

RAZO

Right, right. So you're constantly getting [unclear], and you're cognizant of the sacrifice, but you're also cognizant of what your end goal is. So by that time, my father and I were really getting into it, and my brother had come out of prison and was living with us, and he wasn't getting away from some of his Cholo methods. He was bringing gals and have sex with them in the house, and, man, when he'd come out, then he and I would get into it, and I kept talking to him. "Hey, man, I mean, you're not out in the streets. You talk about respect and so forth." I was dealing with my brother on one hand, and I was dealing with my father on the other hand, and mother and sister. So one day I made a conscious decision, I've got to save myself or else be part of the group and not make it.

So since I was aware of the people in the running community, a number of them said—I was getting ready to graduate from East L.A. College, so some of them said, "Hey, Joe."

Well, one of them said, “We could probably get you an athletic scholarship from Humboldt State College.”

So I said, “That sounds good.”

So he said, “Well, come and see the coach.”

So I took a bus up to Humboldt State College and went and talked to the coach. He said, “Well, I want you to enroll, so go out and pay for your tuition and books, and then I’ll see if I can set you up.”

I said, “Coach, I’ve been around the block a couple of times, and so my understanding is that you take care of that business and you get me enrolled and you put me on an athletic scholarships, and as I mentioned to you on the telephone, I need a job, unless you’re also going to provide dormitory on the campus, and my other friends have told me that generally what happens is since this is a lumber-mill town, that you get us jobs in the lumber mills.”

And he says, “Well, I want you to enroll first.”

I stayed there for about three days and talked to a couple of friends who had gone down there, and so at the end of those three days when that hadn’t happened, I said, “I’ll see you guys later,” and came back down, and that was a big disappointment.

So another individual that was at Cal State L.A., Sy Villa, who later on turned out to be my roommate, says, “We’re aware of your running ability,” and I had made in Southern California and junior college and so forth, and so he said, “Let me talk to the coach at Cal State L.A.” and he called me back up and says, “Tuition and books.”

So I said, “Great. Cal State L.A., here I come,” and so I enrolled at Cal State L.A. and got my education there and ran for them.

While I was there, too, being in psychology, I started volunteering for related psychology type of internship, although we didn’t call it internship. You basically went and you volunteered for organizations like the Foundation for the Junior Blind, and because of my psychology background—it was a charitable organization that over the weekends provided educational classes and camping experiences to blind children. There was a certain segment of blind children that had psychological problems, and many of them were semi rejected by their parents because of their psychological problems, and one of them was the son of a psychiatrist himself.

I took over that little group, and it was more one-to-one or one-to-two ratio, and started dealing with some of those kids. It was a real good experience for me. Then because of the fact that I excelled at that type of work, then the director wanted to hire me. He hired me on a part-time work, and so I started working for the Foundation for the Junior Blind and being a counselor at camp. But that also has its negative aspects because many of these people in charitable organizations see what you're capable of doing, and they also stifle your educational attainment by hiring you because of the fact that you put in long hours and because of your motivation. So you see your goals also slipping away, and you start seeing a number of obstacles where many of these charitable organizations will suck you up and you never become what you wanted to become.

Then later on, I got a job through my roommate, Sy Villa, who had been a psychiatric recreational worker and dealt with some of the kids at the general hospital that's now known as USC. I worked in a psychiatric ward with kids under twelve who had either been molested or had exhibited abnormal behavior in their environment, that they had to be placed in there, sometimes for 90, sometimes for 120 days, to six months. So I went in there and started writing papers that I could use at school, helped me in my academic work, on separation anxiety and some of the problems that kids were experiencing and use their case histories, without naming them, for term papers and at the same time dealing with the kids, providing recreational activities, and dealing with some of their emotional problems.

Again, because that was my major, I would sometimes meet with the psychiatrists, and then they started using me on weekends as a halfway house before the kids went home, because the kids were undergoing many hours of therapy with the psychiatrist and they were doing family therapy. Then they would release them to me on some of the weekends where the kids could stay at my apartment with the rest of my roommates. Of course, my roommate would say, "Oh, man, Joe, we got to sleep with one eye open because some of these kids are—you know." I would bring them in one at a time, because you're bringing your psychos home. You're bringing your work home and so forth. The kids, I mean, some were six, seven. One kid was the offspring of one of a detective, but when Mama and Papa had another kid, he tried to kill the kid at night, and sibling problems. He saw the parents directing more the love to this kid than to him, and so he took it upon himself to try and deal with the problem.

Another twelve-year-old gal, Latina, had been molested by her uncle. Another one was just schizophrenic and would masturbate at the drop of a hat, which was fifty times a day if she could. Of course, at that time, treatment also involved a padded cell, to where if the kids were really out of control, then you had to put them in a padded cell.

ESPINO

What about electric shock and those kinds of treatments?

RAZO

That was going on at that time.

ESPINO

How did you feel about that?

RAZO

Well, I never experienced it, and I don't know if any of the kids were going through, but lobotomies were in at that time too.

ESPINO

What about sterilization?

RAZO

I didn't deal with the adults, but I would hear the buzzers go off with the adults ward floors, because sometimes you would hear the buzzers on the speakers, and they would say, "Psychiatric technicians, we need help. We need help on ward so-and-so, floor so-and-so," and it's like being in the county jail. Then, boom, everyone gets out, puts their key in, and runs out the door and runs to that trouble place.

Sometimes we did have to put the kids in straitjackets, and that's because of the fact that they were getting to the cell, and then they would defecate and throw it all over the walls. You have pads in there, and, of course, all that gets messy, and the psychiatric aides have to come in and clean it up and so forth.

I would partake dinner with the kids when I was there, because they wanted me to be part of the family, and they saw how I was interacting with them. But it was a heck of an experience.

ESPINO

I can imagine. What do you think in your background prepared you for that kind of work?

RAZO

Well, I think the classes that I was taking, and everything seemed oriented towards that way, towards the social field, with the background, the poverty, the whole thing, I saw, and the empathy that I had for people in need.

In fact, one of my dates, I started dating a gal who had transferred from USC and went to Cal State L.A., and so I took her on a date. There was a Christmas Eve party that they were throwing. It wasn't Christmas Eve, but it was a Christmas party that they were throwing for the kids. So I took her to that, and she was in one of my psych classes, and [Spanish word]. She came out with big eyes and said, "This is real life." Later on, she decided psychology wasn't for her. She went into teaching.

But, yes, my orientation started going there, and on the camping trips during the summer with the Foundation for the Junior Blind, they had a camp over in Malibu, and I would drive a truck with all the supplies over there. We would see wildcats and bobcats and all sorts of wildlife there, and poison oak. We'd build cottages for the kids so the kids could stay there during the summer. It was their way of learning independence. We had camp counselors that would lead them, because all the children were blind there. It was a real good, good experience for me.

ESPINO

Did you feel like you were actually helping, not necessarily the kids you worked with who were blind, but the other kids who had more psychiatric issues? Did you feel like you had an impact on them, that they were going to be able to reintegrate in society?

RAZO

Well, quite a number of them came back after they were released, and that's when you quickly find out that it may not be the child's problem but the family problem and that the whole family needs therapy and that it has to be more than a short-term basis. At that time, I started getting some qualms about going into psychology, because I started reading statistics that sometimes it doesn't matter whether it's a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or a layperson, a housewife, who gives counseling to the person in trouble, that the success rate is the same. Thirty-three percent of the people get better with or without counseling. Thirty-three and a third percent get better with some counseling, and thirty-three and a third percent get worse.

So you say, "Wow. Is psychology really a science, or is it the shotgun approach?" So I started questioning the scientific approach of psychology in that it hasn't been proven yet, and started leaning more towards experimental psychology, which deals with operate conditioning, just a whole bunch of more research-oriented terms but more science based rather than just clinical psych.

ESPINO

Rather than the talk therapy.

RAZO

Right. But at the same time, I said there's got to be a good mixture to verify results. So that's where I started focusing at school. Now, when I'm still at school and taking all these classes, I've graduated now by '65. I never attended my graduation ceremony.

ESPINO

Why not?

RAZO

I never attended my East L.A. graduation ceremony either. Those things really have never been important to me. And what do you get? Your immediate family? That's chaotic to show

up. And have a party afterwards and get drunk? I don't need that, and so I just, "Send me my degree," type of thing, and I'll get it by the mail, which I did.

At that time my roommates were pretty good. I had been with Sy Villa and Mundie Lopez and Ray Cisneros. Ray had had a scholarship to Occidental College for running, and Ray had graduated from Occidental and decided he was going to go to the Peace Corps. Mundie was coaching track and also had his own gardening job as an independent contractor. Sy wanted to go into industrial arts and social work.

At that time we started being radicalized. We were aware that the Vietnam War was happening and that a lot of Latinos were getting drafted and being killed. This was, I think, yes, it might have been my first year at Cal State L.A. Sy had access to printing press at Cal State L.A., since he was an industrial arts major. We would print Christmas cards with a picture of the Vietnamese girl that had been napalmed and she's running down a dirt road, smoking. So for Christmas cards, that was the Christmas cards to all our friends, saying, "While you may remember Christmas, think about what's going on in the world. Is this girl having a good Christmas?"

I saw my thinking becoming more political in those ways, and finally when I graduated, then my first year in my master's degree—no, even before, before that, there was a gal that came over from UCLA. And she took a class with me, some psychology class with Dr. Kiker. For whatever reason, they gave a take-home exam, and it was a really tough one to where you had to stay up almost from Friday night to Monday morning to be able to turn it in. She was the cutest thing on campus. She was almost like a little blondie, red-headish gal, and everyone was just looking at her when she used to come by, and all the guys in class flocked to her and so forth when she walked on campus.

After the first class, Dr. Kiker said, "Well, I've graded all the papers, and, boy, I don't know what went wrong with my teaching, but just about everyone missed all the questions except for one person." And that happened to be me. So he praised me, and I don't know what I did right, other than put in a lot of work with lack of sleep for those three days. Then all of a sudden, next class I see her sitting next to me, and I said, "Okay. I get it."

ESPINO

You did?

RAZO

Yes, yes, oh, absolutely.

ESPINO

You weren't seduced by that?

RAZO

Yes, no. No, absolutely. Then she started walking me to my classes, and I said, “Jeez, I have the cutest gal on campus that everyone wants to meet, and she’s walking me to my classes. It should be the opposite. I should be walking her to the classes.”

Some of the other students went, “Who’s that? Who’s that?” I would introduce her to the other people.

One lady one time when she saw me walking alone—she was a night student, so she was a mature lady—and she said, “Boy, you know, that gal that you’ve got is the cutest gal. Is she your girlfriend?”

I said, “She’s not my gal.”

“She isn’t? She’s always walking with you.”

I said, “She walks me to my classes, but those kind of gals are the kind of gals you really have to be afraid of, because those kind of gals are so damn good-looking that you wind up marrying them, having babies, and that stops your education.”

I was so damn focused, I was going to make it one way or the other. If I was willing to fight past good-looking skirts like this, I just—you know. Well, later on she apparently talked to her mother. They lived Pico Rivera or somewhere. I don’t know if she dropped out of UCLA and went to Cal State. But then her mother called me. Her mother said, “I want to talk to you.” Okay. So we met. She came over one night, and she said, “I just wanted to talk to you about my family. My daughter tells me that you just have so many girlfriends.” And I didn’t have many girlfriends. I didn’t have any girlfriends. I dated every now and then, but it was far and in between. But apparently by my throwing or putting her at arm’s length, she told Mama, “I can’t make it with this guy.”

So Mama comes over and says, “I’m having problems with one of my sons who is dating someone who I really don’t—and I’d like you to introduce him to a better class of girls.” So they were trying to use me so that they can—and I just said, “I’m not into that.”

“I’d like to come and clean your apartment every now and then, Joe,” and so forth.

I told Mama, “Thank you, but we do our own cleaning.” I had three roommates at that time.

Later on, I saw her in later life, and she had graduated from UCLA and became a social worker, but she was a psychology major.

ESPINO

What did you make of all that?

RAZO

What did I make of it? What I made of it is that to me, for me, I wanted to make it and I wanted to make it in education, and that I was willing to forsake many short-term goals for the long term, and that I was willing to control my hormones and time and just concentrate on what needed to be done. That also surprised me, that I was still focused on that.

ESPINO

So you dated, but you never fell in love?

RAZO

I dated, but I dated very little. Most of my time was spent in the books. I guess to a great extent I was a sweat hog, but I needed it, I never had the basics, I had to learn it by myself, and so the only way I could do it was by out-working others. And I knew that of myself. It's not going to come quickly, and it's going, but once you learn it, then things will be easier, and it's not like you have the natural ability to just do that, but you do have pretty good common sense, and so if you're willing to put in the time and sacrifice family and sacrifice dating and sacrifice this, you're going to make it.

So that was a good feeling in that you know yourself and you know your self-worth, and it's not at the expense of others, and that the lesson that many of us learned, that in terms of self-worth, that before you can love others, you have to learn to love yourself. And I was still learning about myself. You see too many marriages or too many dating relationships, which my roommates and other friends got into, was always at the expense of one partner or the other. To me, I attribute that because of the fact that they did not know enough about themselves, about their self-worth. You saw a number of marriages, because at that time I was now into a master's program and started dealing with marriage counseling.

ESPINO

At Cal State Los Angeles?

RAZO

At Cal State. And conducting classes on marriage counseling. You quickly learn that the idea of marriage for people is that two entities join together, and they join together like one. They become one, and that that is the worst thing that they can do, because one party or the other is controlling. Their identities have merged into one. Marriage should be like this, 50-50 on each side, and you have to leave a little room here for the self, the individual, and that only 50 percent here is family. You have to allow your partner a leeway to grow, and she may be growing in different ways than you are, but that's good. She shouldn't be entirely what you conceive or your image of yourself. And sometimes you see couples that one starts one sentence and the other one finishes it, so the identity between those persons has been lost. You have to retain your self-identity while at the same time having the trust in the other person to grow and to retain their own identity. That doesn't mean that there's

not going to be conflict. There's always going to be conflict. But it's just the way you handle that conflict, and not to go to bed at night bad mouthing one another.

As I'm going through this and doing the psychological counseling, I'm also taking classes in group counseling. I had one particular professor at Cal State L.A. that was handling the group counseling, that was Dr. Snyder, and the group counseling was done at night in his home.

But before I get to that, when I'm working on my master's, I'm doing a lot of testing and trying to make it and trying to make a name for myself in psychology, and so I have friends of mine that had graduated before me, three or four years before me, from Roosevelt High School or from Garfield High School, and friends who graduated with me in my same class but were ahead of me because of my four years in the air force. So they come to me and they say, "Joe, there's going to be a party at some teacher's house," and many of them were already teachers, "and why don't you come over and hang around?"

I said, "You know what? I'm helping a friend of mine in this master's seminar, and he's trying to reinvent a new personality test based on number of questions, and we're trying to correlate it. I'm helping him out on what correlation this question has in terms of validity to the next question. And there's going to be a lot of teachers there, right?"

"Yes, most of them are female."

"Great. We need subjects." So I said, "Do you think I could administer this test to them?"

ESPINO

That's funny. [laughs]

RAZO

Always in my mind, maybe I can kill two birds with one stone, but always work in mind. Then my buddy couldn't go, and he said, "Would you administer the tests for me, Joe?"

"Sure." So I took the test with me and went over there and found a lot of willing free subjects with the young teachers. I looked at one and I was really visually impressed. And I said, "Oh, boy, yeah," and gave her the test. Later on I mentioned to her, "I'd like to see you again."

And she said, "Great." So I dated her now and then and felt that I was falling too much for her emotionally, and she was already teaching, and so I broke it off.

ESPINO

She was established, but you hadn't reached your—

RAZO

You're right. I hadn't reached my goal and broke it off. She called me when I was breaking it off. Of course, I didn't have the guts to say it face to face, and it wasn't like we had committed to each other. But I just said, "I'm just finding that in thinking of you, you're interfering too much with my education and that I'd rather be spending time with you than with the books. At the stage I'm in my life, that's really detrimental to my goals."

And she said, "I have a lot to offer, and we can meet those goals together, and you're making a mistake."

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

So I said, "Well, okay." Two days later, I find myself in my old jalopy, an English Ford, driving over to her house in Monterey Park and knocking on her door, and before you know it, I'm committed. I'm just saying, "Gosh."

But she kept saying, "We can do it together."

ESPINO

Wow, that's bold of her to be—

RAZO

Yes, yes.

ESPINO

She must have been very confident because—

RAZO

Yes, and, you know, she is now my wife. We moved in together, and later on I met—I never met her father. Her father died during our courtship. I met her mother. They were from Nebraska. Her father used to be an accountant with a car company and had moved quite a lot, so there wasn't too much stability in terms of moving all the time. Eventually she had wound up and attended to Glendale High School and then to Glendale Junior College and then on to UCLA and graduated from UCLA and became a teacher at Sheridan Elementary School here in East L.A. So we hooked up, and my love needs and companionship were met, but I wasn't—was I married? I guess I was. I was entering my last year. It was a two-years master's program at CSULA, and we had a child so I now was a father.

Then I got involved in a couple of campus situations where the John Birch Society came over. The John Birchers were really right-wingers, but they were talking about the new society of Republicans that at that time they didn't mention party affiliation that they were preaching for, and so I went over to hear the seminar. It was at night, and it wasn't something that was assigned by class or something. It was just about politics. I listened to them and I said, "Well, jeez, sounds good what they're trying to do, very patriotic, very self-worth." I attended another meeting and heard more, and then I said, "Wait a minute." I kept turning around and, well, no minorities, all whites, San Marino type.

Then I saw one Latino come in and question them from the audience, and "You guys are blah, blah, blah, and next to Hitler," and that kind of stuff.

And I thought, "How rude."

As I'm going through this, then I obtained a part-time job for the summer with the real Great Society, the Johnson and Kennedy programs. John Kennedy was starting to push the real Great Society, and federal funds were being issued for poverty programs. I went in and I interviewed for a job in El Sereno for a job counselor type of thing, that was providing employment for high school youth for the summer in the local neighborhood of El Sereno and Lincoln Heights, and I was made the director of that chapter in Lincoln Heights. I hired a handicapped guy that was very good, and he was able to get all the businessmen that would talk to him, they provided a lot of jobs.

ESPINO

Was that a Teen Post?

RAZO

No, no. Economic Youth Opportunity Agency. We provided so many jobs that the people in headquarters took notice, and then the local city councilman, who was Art Snyder, and his aide, Sid Molina, came over and visited the office. Of course, they wanted the pictures, you know. Anytime you get publicity, and I started getting publicity through the local newspaper, then you always have politicians running to it, because they can get free publicity and they can identify with a successful program.

He gave us commendations, resolutions, that kind of junk that you see for my wife and so forth, and I have all mine in crates. All they do is gather dust after a while. But this is the way the politicians pay you off.

He invited me attend a conference over in Lincoln Heights because the community was complaining about police brutality. He says, "Since you live in the community, you can represent us and address their concern." Oh, he didn't know beans about me, about my concerns, or where I was coming from or my background. All he says is, "Here's a successful guy, he is doing something for us, and he'll probably scratch my back, and wants

to make it in the political world."

I attended that conference, and that was my first touching base with La Raza, and it was held at the auditorium of Lincoln High School, and the attendance was sparse. But there were about four or five of us that were panelists on the stage, and then the people would come in. We called some of them Mau Mau. Mau Mau at that time was a tribe in Africa that was rebelling against the whites, and they were doing the Mau Mau; in other words, just bitching about what was happening. So a number of them came down, and they had bells sewn into the inseam of their pants, and bells around their waists.

When I was taking psychology classes, I also got interested into propaganda, how Hitler and many of the youth were brainwashed or how during the Korean War the Koreans had captured pilots and army personnel and used brainwashing techniques to turn them around against the U.S. and how some of them still live in Korea or Vietnam and would speak out against the United States. I was aware of the brainwashing that was going on. So when these youth came down with their pants, jingle, jingle, and, of course, when you hear something disruptive, all the audience starts [demonstrates], and they're walking up and down. I saw it as a tactic to disrupt the meeting, and on the microphone I said, "Hey, come on up," and walked up to the microphone. I said, "Obviously you want to get someone's attention, and tell me about it." Then they went on about the police and all that, and I said, "Great."

"And they said none of you guys represent the community up there."

I said, "You know what? You may be right. You may have more community standing that we do. And I'll tell you what, I have absolutely no problem with the tactics you're using or what you're saying. In fact, let me tell you something, come on over, take my chair on this stage, so you can make your appeal from this chair rather than from out there where people may not see you or hear you. You have legitimate complaints. I'm the first one to tell you take my seat. Come on over."

Well, I called their bluff, and no one came on over. After the meeting, one of them came over and gave me a copy of La Raza, and that was first or second publication that they had come up with. I read it and I said, "Well, a lot of it is [Spanish word], and some of it has certain issues that we should be dealing with in the community."

Next day I told my wife, "I'm going over to this church," because they were at the Church of the Epiphany, Father Luce's church. I went over there and met with Risco, who was the first editor of La Raza, and talked with him. He talked about education, and I said, "Why don't you guys publish an issue on education and what the dropout rates are?"

Well, no one had really done research. They knew the educational system stunk, but no one really had gone out there and put in the time researched school by school and got the documents from the Board of Education. I said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm

researching in it, I'm working my master's at Cal State L.A. in experimental psychology, and all these documents should be available."

I start going over there and looking into and getting booklets from the dropout rates year by year that the L.A. Board of Education had, and compiling, and I wrote a story for them and started meeting people. I didn't hang around there, but I would go every now and then and meet, like I would see Richard Alatorre, who later on became a city councilman and assemblyman. Once in a while Art Torres would come by and meet some of the local people. The Chicano Movement was just starting.

ESPINO

Was it '68?

RAZO

Sixty-seven, maybe even early '67, just when Risco had come down. They were talking about something about we need to reach the kids, the high school kids, and they said—I saw Sal Castro come over one day, but Sal wasn't really a regular visit, and apparently Sal was already a thorn at that school—

ESPINO

Lincoln.

RAZO

—doing something about that.

The more I got involved in it, the more stories I started writing on stereotypes, taking my camera and going to various restaurants and other institutions and taking pictures of the portrayal of Chicanos or Latinos, and the movie industry, how they portray our women, you know, hot, dancers, castanetas and so forth, and how they always portrayed us as waiters, gardeners. With my psychology background and having studied the impact of stereotype on various groups and images and all that, I started the writing about that and talking about those negative images.

Then I started looking at what organizational models they had, and it was unclear to me what organizational model La Raza was using in terms of organizing, and they told me the only one that had experience was Risco and that he had been an organizer with the United Farm Workers. I don't know if whether it was one year, two years, six months, or whatever, but that he had and Ruth had been brought over by Father Luce, and that Father Luce had been looking for someone to help organize in East L.A., and that there was a group of youngsters who had started coffeehouse near Olympic Boulevard, called the Youth—they ran the Piranya Coffeehouse.

So one night I went over there with Risco and, I think, Father Luce, or after school or

something, and met with some of them. David Sanchez was the leader. There were no Brown Berets at that time. But I didn't see any real evidence of what I would call organizing or gathering and meeting in groups and talking about, "We need to focus on this or that." I started reaching out to some of the black groups that I had read about in the newspapers, the US groups, the Black Panthers, and going on my own, not with a group, not on behalf of any group, but just going on my own and starting to see what the black organizations were about and getting ideas.

ESPINO

Why did you care all of a sudden in '67, '66?

RAZO

Well, to me, again going back to my psychology, and my psychology, and it wasn't that I was doing it for the group; I was doing it for myself. You first have to do it for yourself. Everyone gives you the what I call bullshit, to put it in plain language, that, "Oh, I did it for my people," and that's bullshit. You first do it for yourself. You do it for your self-worth, you do it for your image, you do it for your own psychological catharsis of still finding out who you are. Again, it goes back to that psychological insight that before you love others, you have to love yourself.

So here there are still some aspects of you that you're trying to find inner insight into. So when you go and you see the struggles of the black community and you're seeing what they've gone through and the tactics that they are using, and on the other hand you're also meeting with your own groups but your own groups are not giving you any guidance as to, "We're organizing for this." Or they throw general statements without being specifics.

With me, I'm a plan guy. You tell me, you give me the general [unclear] line and the subcategories on it and fill in the details, and then we can talk about organizing. But if you just give me a general plan, say, "We're out to gain power for our people," what the hell does that mean? Everyone's out to gain power for our people. I wanted the specifics filled in, and, to tell you the truth, I don't think we had that kind of leadership in our organizations at that time. I think many of these things were just being formulated. In fact, if anyone had more of a clear idea, later on I found out it was probably the UCLA group, and it was probably the UCLA group because of Juan Quinones, Juan Gomez rather than because of what we had over here.

I learned more from some of the black groups just in talking to them. I never really got to meet the Ron Karengas and the real leaders of the Panthers, but just from speaking to the soldiers, the marchers, and participation and reading and applying the psychological principles that I learned. I never went formally through an organizing school. Everything that I used was psychology, group pressure, individual pressure, praise, positive reinforcement rather than negative reinforcement, conditioning, operative. All these terms I just put into use in terms of my organizing.

But then I started branching out and meeting other groups. Some of the UMAS people

would come over. They would talk about camp, and then Juan came over with Joe Berry and a couple of the others, and I thought to myself, “Juan’s very sharp. Yes, he’s very sharp intellectually, has very good writing skills. In fact, he should be writing for La Raza, because he certainly writes a hell of a lot better than any of us.” But then I learned he had a Ph.D., and he was a professor already at UCLA and was able to influence the Moctesuma Esparzas and many other students —and Moctesuma used to hang around in the office and come three or four times a week and touch base. Then I started thinking, “Well, Risco imparts knowledge on a need-to-know basis, and this might not be the organization for me.” If I can call it an organization, because I really didn’t see too many bodies there.

So I was communicating through Ruth Robinson, and Ruth Robinson and Risco were a pair, or they had come down as a pair. I was also noticing what was going on, because Eli would also use women in the same way that we had previously talked about where some—

ESPINO

You’re kidding me.

RAZO

—where some people were just—he needed a ride, he did not have transportation, and so he’d have a woman drive him over to Fresno. Then I saw the tensions that were developing from within the office, and I told Ruth, “You know, I think it’s time for me to take my leave.”

ESPINO

Can we just back up a little before we go into that, because that’s going to be a pretty lengthy discussion—

RAZO

Well, I’m not—I’m only touching on it.

ESPINO

But I want to. I have some questions that I would like to ask you. But this, this question is just some—if I could get more detail on that first meeting at Lincoln High School. For example, you mentioned you were on a panel.

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

Who were you on the panel with, do you remember?

RAZO

I don't even remember, but it was a panel that was put together by Councilman Art Snyder, who represented—

ESPINO

Women or just men?

RAZO

—the 14th Council District, and he apparently got residents from a number of the communities that were part of his council district. I think it was 14th Council District, which includes El Sereno as part of Los Angeles City and Lincoln Heights. Sid Molina, who was his chief political assistant, and, of course, Sid later on broke up with him and ran against Art Snyder, and Art had his own shenanigans going, which he later on wound up hooking up with a USC college coed. In fact, you'll see one of the streets that's named after his daughter, Marisela or something like that name. I know that's also Raul's daughter's name, but he got one of the streets named off of Pasadena Freeway, and [Spanish word] all the time.

ESPINO

This panel was focused on education?

RAZO

No, the focus was on police brutality. Do you remember who came in from La Raza, who was there?

RAZO

Well, Henry Gomez was one of the individuals that was wearing the bells. I don't even know if Eli was there. Henry Gomez is now deceased. He was one of our guys that used to hang around the office. He never wrote for us. He was not a photographer. He was just one of the semi [Spanish word] that used to hang around with Benny Luna and Frank, and his uncle used to hang around there.

ESPINO

How influenced were you by the Civil Rights Movement in the South, Dr. Martin Luther King, things that were happening in the mid-fifties, late fifties, early sixties?

RAZO

Well, I wasn't influenced when I was in the South. I saw the discrimination. Where I was influenced is actually by hearing about it in the newspaper and the radio or television and seeing images of it. My influence was more towards the Peace Corps volunteers, since my roommate was saying, "I'm going to go to Venezuela and volunteer over there to help the poor people over there."

I kept saying, "Don't they have a Peace Corps here in the States?" I forget what answer he

gave me, but it was that everyone was leaning towards going over there, so we had Latinos that were going to go out of the country to go volunteer their services. Ray Ciniceros later on went over and got his Ph.D. and became the track coach at East L.A. College and taught at East L.A. College after he returned. But he didn't have his Ph.D. He received his Ph.D. after he came back.

So, no, I was really not too touched, except by what I saw. My empathy and my sympathy was not from any one role model. My role models were my classmates and two professors at college, Dr. Kiker, who praised me for my paper and later on became my mentor and who said, "I'll sponsor your thesis," and who when I was at Cal State L.A. said, "Joe, where you're going with a lot of this is oriented toward neurological theory, and with your athletic ability, why don't we put in for a grant so that you can do some experiment."

We did put in for a grant and we got the grant, and it was supposed to be an experiment on a theory of neurological injury to the brain, that when a person is injured, that you can revitalize other areas of the brain to pick up the functions of that part, even though it may be in a different hemisphere, by introducing risk behavior. So I was going to hire a couple of gymnasts and put the kids on the trampoline to do back flips. The gymnasts would put ropes on them and safety belts and teach them, and that later on we would do a before-and-after test based on intelligence and motor functions, and then we would be able to say, "Yes, look it, they scored higher." But the caveat was that you didn't know because since they were a special group, it could be because the increase in intelligence became because of the special attention you levied upon them rather than because really new neurological functions had occurred.

When I started looking into it and the time that it took, I got halfway into it and I said, "Vern, this is a two-year project, and I cannot." At that time, you didn't have cameras that you could play back. Everything was done with 16-millimeter film, and you had to have a photographer. I would be doing the shooting, and knowing we needed feedback, you had to take it to have it developed and bring it back and then look at it, and I just said, "I can't afford to spend that time on that project. So it's not something that's going to be published with my name but with yours first." And you learned the techniques that's so many professors, when you're at the university level, it's publish or perish. At least it was at that time. I don't know how it is now.

ESPINO

No, it's the same.

RAZO

The more papers they published, and, of course, their name always came first, and every grad assistant would be under them. I just said, "Not for me. It's too long of a project. I can spin off all sorts of other projects with it, and I'll never reach my goal." So I begged off of it, but I did take him for quite a number of units, so he had a profound experience on me in terms of being a mentor. But in terms of civil rights and all that, no. No, I did not have any mentors.

ESPINO

Were you influenced—because you said your friend was going to go to the Peace Corps, and I'm assuming he was influenced by John F. Kennedy. What was that statement he made? "Ask not what your country—." Were you influenced by those kinds of things?

RAZO

No, no, I was more influenced by what I saw, the disparity of Chicanos dying in the Vietnam War, or Latinos, and what was happening not so much to Latinos but to third-world natives and the imposition of our standards to third countries, to using them as part of our property, an extension, and that every time that we wanted to, we never stabilized those countries but pulled away from them and went to wherever we could send our industrialized goods. A lot of that just came from self-realization and self-reading.

ESPINO

What about having lived abroad, so to speak? Did that make you more open?

RAZO

No, I didn't live abroad. Newfoundland was—I mean, it was isolated. There was no influence. The only thing I learned, I learned about all the rebellion that was going on through reading those butcher-type papers were from the crypto, and that was opening my eyes.

ESPINO

That was your education.

RAZO

I mean, that was everywhere that that was going on.

ESPINO

That was your education to global politics. That's very interesting.

RAZO

And also from my classmates when I was in high school, that I saw them paying attention to global politics on the news and sending for those publications. So, no, it wasn't anything locally other than what had happened with the Civil Rights Movement. It wasn't like someone took me under and took me in and said, "We're going to tell you about all these stories."

ESPINO

But were you influenced by UFW, by Cesar Chavez's movement?

RAZO

Not initially, not initially. In fact, I don't remember reading too much about it when I was working on my master's.

ESPINO

Then I go back to the question of how. Well, you explained how you got involved with community issues, but why did it become important for you?

RAZO

Poverty, poverty, and, again, I dealt with poverty more on a class system than an ethnic system, racism. I dealt with it strictly on poverty. I don't care what color you are or what shade of color you are or what race you are. If you're poor and you are hungry, then you're in the world that I can relate to.

ESPINO

What were your politics evolving into at that time? You had a class ideology. What about the race ideology?

RAZO

I was probably registered to vote, but I don't think I was involved in the political. I was aware that politics meant power and that—

ESPINO

Do you want me to pause it for a second? [interruption]

ESPINO

Okay, we're back, and you were telling me about your influences and you were registered to vote. You weren't sure if you were registered to vote or you weren't—

RAZO

I don't even know if I was registered to vote, but I've always been political in terms of knowing what was going on with the world, whether it be the Korean War or Vietnam or school politics. Many of my friends were school officers, not only in high school but also in college.

But I wouldn't say that politics had a distinct impact on my going into the Chicano Movement. I went into the Chicano Movement because I happened to be on the panel, and I was aware that I had possibility of being a golden hair fair boy for some of the local politicians, because they were always looking for someone that can do their catering, to be their caddy on their golf clubs. So they were always looking for someone that could pick up those things. I've always been able to understand human behavior and personality, but, no, I was not seeking a political line of occupation or to even get involved in a political line of occupation.

ESPINO

What were your goals when you—

RAZO

My goals were to get a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, period.

ESPINO

It sounds like your work with La Raza newspaper was a bit of a digression from that goal.

RAZO

No, it was a sidestep for me, just like it was a sidestep for me to go into the Foundation for the Junior Blind or to become an aide over in the psychiatric hospital at USC, and many times I saw these as fulfilling an experience that I needed to fulfill but also as an obstacle that was placed in my path to finally reaching my goal. I kept becoming aware that too many of these obstacles were coming into being, or even my marriage, in my end goal, and that ultimately I would have to get off that pot and focus and be very selfish and focus 100 percent of my attention on my goal, or I was not going to meet it. That was because of the fact that I was now married, I had a child, I had a wife, and time was moving on me.

ESPINO

So how did you negotiate your time then? Let's talk about the period where you were going to La Raza office more regularly then in the early days when you were writing for them.

RAZO

Well, in the early days, I was really not going on a regular basis. I was just touching base maybe once, twice a week.

ESPINO

That's pretty often. I mean, I think when I think about my husband being somewhere two or three—that seems like it would be a lot if I had a child at home.

RAZO

It wasn't a lot to me. I would spend an hour, an hour and a half, or two, and then after a while I would walk away with thinking, "This is a waste of my time." I would think it's a waste of time because I wasn't getting the reinforcement that I needed. In other words, the sharing of information was not there from Eli, and, again, because either for whatever reason and sometimes it's because he don't trust outsiders, the conspiracy theory, and someone who knows who they're affiliated with, or because of the fact of their own lack of organizing experience. What I was saying there was that initially I came in with the expectations of, okay, they're going to tell me what the game plan is.

ESPINO

Or look at you and say, “Look it, we’ve got this person who wants to work for us. He’s talented. He’s educated.”

RAZO

Right. And let’s go. What I saw is that there was sort of a floundering, and so then I had to question myself, “Do they really know what they’re doing?” If they seem to, in terms of the group, but then with some of the people that are involved, are they really? Because I didn’t see a lot of education with the people initially that were hanging around there that would seem to be hanging there as a hangout. I didn’t see the Juans. I saw the Moctes every now and then, but it wasn’t like they were there on a continual basis. I didn’t see the Sal Castros, and I kept thinking to myself, “Okay, if you don’t see it, and if you’re ready to move on,” and if I told Ruth, “Okay, I’ve written a couple of stories. It’s been nice to know you. I’ve got to move on to what I’m doing,” and Ruth said, “Don’t go. Hang around. Eleazar is trying to get the grant through IFCO,” which I later on found out was the Interfaith Community Organization, and it was a grant, I guess, basically, to organize.

So you learn in many ways through putting a probe here and a probe there as to where the real power is, and the real power wasn’t really Eli. The real power was Father Luce. After all these years, I have come to the conclusion that Father Luce was the father of the Chicano Movement, at least in East L.A. Father Luce came from the Clare Boothe family, multimillionaire’s family from New York. He chose a religious life for whatever reason. He was never a mentor to me and I never looked upon him as a mentor, but one thing I do is I do analytical work in terms of finding out who the power is and where the buttons are pushed in order to make things move. He was an individual that practiced what he preached, and he felt that the way to change things in the community is not from the pulpit. You get down from the pulpit and you go out into the community, and you find out what the problems are and you identify with the people, and then you start moving things around and encouraging people.

The Brown Berets came about because of Father Luce. La Raza came about because of Father Luce. He was the one that recruited Eli and Ruth. Of course, they were looking also for a way out, out of the Farm Workers, where you only make five dollars a month. That’s what you’re paid for in the Farm Workers, and it’s not like they provide you with housing and they provide you with food. Basically when you join the Farm Workers, they say, “We are going to send you to New York,” or “We are going to send you to Boston.”

And you say, “Okay. How am I going to get there?”

They say, “That’s why we call you an organizer. You learn. You do it on your own.”

“How am I going to live there? Where am I going to live there?”

“Oh, you go to this church. We’ll tell you.” From there on, you’re on your own.

ESPINO

Figure it out, yes.

RAZO

Yes. You hustle. You learn how to organize. And that's why a lot of people also left the Farm Workers. They were expecting to go into a set structure. Money was going to be provided to them. Transportation, "We'll pay for your transportation from here to there." Doesn't work that way. It's you hustle on your own. If you learn how to be a hustler, you're going to learn how to be an organizer.

I had started reading books on power, and basically the books that I read on power say that everyone is an asset. Every person has something to contribute. Some people have minimal assets. They can only get you a ream of mimeograph paper from where they work. That's okay. You can use that ream to print out leaflets. Some people have access to a Xerox machine. That's an asset. You start putting all that information up here. What assets are out there? And that's what I was doing in doing this probing. I went out looking for people, finding out where the assets were. The way you find out who the leaders are and who they are not is you go out into the community and you say, "Okay, Virginia, who are the leaders in your community?"

And you say, "[unclear]."

Then you go to those three, and you say, "Who are the leaders in your community?" You're forming another pyramid. Here's your base. Here are your soldiers. And finally by asking all those people that people are mentioning, you are now finding who's really running that community or that neighborhood. And that's what I started doing.

ESPINO

You didn't see Father Luce in that role in Lincoln Heights?

RAZO

Initially?

ESPINO

Yes.

RAZO

Well, initially I knew that he was a leader. I knew that he was a leader, because they were using the church, the basement of the church, to meet. They didn't have a separate office. They didn't have a separate house. It wasn't until later that we branched out to that. So he initially brought them over, and I know that they didn't have any money or Risco would have been driving a car to go to the church, and he wasn't. He was using public

transportation, and there were a couple of times that they asked me to pick him up on my way to the office, where I lived from El Sereno. When Risco had some business and he wanted to go to Delano or something, he would get one of the girlfriends to drive him over there. So, again, it goes back to what Cesar was doing with the Farm Workers. If you're an organizer, you know how to get there.

ESPINO

What did you think of the leadership of Father Luce? Because a lot of people who came in touch with him that I've talked to describe him as being a mentor, and you say he wasn't your mentor.

RAZO

Well, he wasn't a mentor to me. No, he was a mentor to many people, but he wasn't a mentor to me. My mentors I left at college, and those were the last mentors that I had.

ESPINO

Did you feel like you were on the same—like you didn't need mentoring? I mean, is that what you're saying, you no longer needed mentoring, you were going to be a mentor?

RAZO

I think so. I was either twenty-eight or twenty-nine, so I think with the psychological background that I already had, I knew the game. I knew [Spanish word]. I wasn't quite on the sophisticated basis. All I needed to do was to know how it worked, and then I would put the pieces together. I was always, and have always been, very observant. Many times I do very little talking. I would just go into a group setting and look at the dynamics of the group setting and see who does what and be able to determine who are the leaders, who are the guys behind the scene, and who are the foot soldiers. That's what I was doing with La Raza. But I knew that there had to be someone behind Eli and Ruth, and once I heard the name Boothe, and they said, "Yeah, he's related to Clare Boothe," and I was able to put two and two.

ESPINO

Okay. So I think we're going to stop here, and we'll pick up in that next phase next time. [End of February 25, 2013 interview]

1.3. Session Three (March 8, 2013)

ESPINO

This is Virginia Espino, and today is March 8, International Day of Women. I'm interviewing Joe Razo in his home in Alhambra, California.

I want to start today with—last time we finished off with your entry into the culture of La Raza, the La Raza newspaper, Father Luce's Episcopal Church, and I'd like to go back to

that moment because I recently had the great fortune of interviewing Ruth Robinson Rivera. Rivera is her married name from her husband. She's now divorced. But I asked her if she considers herself one of the founders. It's very well established that Eleazar Risco was the founder of La Raza. I want to ask you how do you feel about it, because you were there in the very early days, probably the same months that they were actually beginning the first publications. How would you describe the founding of that?

RAZO

Well, to me, the truth is that La Raza was really run by Ruth, and I guess we could say that both Ruth and Eleazar were the co-founders of La Raza, but the truth is that Ruth showed everyone how to do the layout work. She did the typing on—I believe is was a Stetner machine, almost looked like a teletype machine. Of course, I had experience from communications in the air force on all those type of machines. But Ruth was the one that took you to all the various steps, and not only that, she was the one that managed the office, if you could call that managing the office.

Initially when I came to La Raza, after about a month or a month and a half there, I was ready to leave, because I really didn't see any progress being made, and I was already doing research into some of the stories on the dropout rate that I wanted to do. We were talking about blowouts but no hard research had been done, at least that I had seen published. I was spending a lot of time at the Board of Education, picking up booklets from various schools, and seeing what the dropout rate and then breaking down some statistics and compiling tables and that kind of stuff.

Finally, I didn't see where La Raza was going as a newspaper, and I indicated to Ruth that I was going to split, that I was going to leave. I didn't see any plan or organizing movement going on. I didn't see any major recruitment taking place. And she was the one that talked me out of it. She said, "Hold on. We're preparing—." And she didn't say "we." She said, "Risco is meeting with some IFCO people, and Father Luce is helping him with it and so is Walter Brennan." Walter Brennan was with a black organization from South L.A. He wasn't at the Black Panther level. He was more into the religious role, but he was going around, putting in sound bites to various community groups to try and get them to organize. He was playing the Father Luce's role in the black community.

They were the ones that were floating the proposal to the Interfaith Community Organization, which is based in New York. That organization was apparently receiving proposals to fund grassroots organizations to organize. But Risco had never taken me into confidence and told me basically what he was doing. I'm sure that Father Luce was the one that set him up, because, in my opinion, Father Luce was really the father of the Chicano Movement.

ESPINO

Would you say he's one of the founders of the newspaper, Father Luce?

RAZO

Well, no. Father Luce brought Ruth and Risco, and from what I gather from Risco is that he informed me that just in talking to some of the local people that they were the ones that put the bug in his ear, “Why don’t we start our own newspaper.”

At that time, most of us, when we picked up the L.A. Times or the Mirror, or the Daily News, and when we looked at every TV channel, you never saw any brown faces, and the stories were never about the problems in our community or what was happening in the community. So La Raza was going to be a local newspaper that dealt with some of the community problems. The only one that was doing that was La Opinion, but it wasn’t really addressed to the younger generation.

I consider Ruth to really be the heart of La Raza when I began, and that’s when, after she spoke to me, then I started organizing and bringing in new people and looking to see who could address some of the issues. I wanted more of a research-oriented type of organization, rather than let’s sit down and let me write anything I feel that comes to my mind. I wanted some statistics. I wanted some percentages. I wanted college type of research, and that’s when I saw that the Moctesuma Esparzas and Juan Gomez started coming around. I considered Juan to be the head of the UCLA group, and he brought Joe Berry and quite a number of UCLA students with him, at least ten of them when we used to sit down every once in a while to La Raza.

Richard Alatorre had not been elected to the assemblyman. He was an administrative aide to Mike Karabian, who was an assemblyman. So Richard was coming around and touching base, too, to see where the votes were, a local politician, very assertive. Ricardo Calderon was running for Congress, and he also was coming around.

ESPINO

When you say “coming around,” do you mean just kind of coming around to say hi or—

RAZO

Coming around to say hi. They never really stayed long. They would stay maybe twenty, thirty minutes at the latest. “Hi, how you doing? What’s happening? What are you guys working on? What are the latest stories?” and that kind of stuff. I think what they were really doing was trying to touch base with Father Luce, who they had already identified as a mover in the community, and Eli, who was head of La Raza, at least technically, and just seeing what the latest gossip in the community was, what were we involved with, because they were aware that we were starting to address the educational disparities that existed. Quite a number of individuals were coming, not as a group. Ed Bonilla from National Association of Neighborhood Projects—

ESPINO

NAPP.

RAZO

—sort of like NAPP, yes, just a lot like a poverty type of program, were also coming around. Later on, Ed Bonilla brought Luis Garza, and that's how Luis got involved in La Raza. Luis was lost. I mean, here's a Chicano that lived in New York, which is—he didn't know any other Mexicans over there. All he knew was Puerto Ricans, all of a sudden he is discharged from the navy and moves over here, washing dishes, taking whatever job he could, and he winds up through Ed Bonilla at our office, and we explained to him what's happening, and everything's an adventure to him. It was not a matter of racism, not this and that, but he had served with a lot of southern boys on ships, and he was aware of the discrimination on blacks. Many of us knew from anthropology and archaeology that we all emigrated as primitives out of Africa, and when you say that to the white southerner, they don't want to hear that their parents emigrated from Africa. He used to use that and got involved in discussions with them on the ship and stuff like that. Luis used to come in every now and then, but he was really working for NAPP.

Then I started recruiting various people. Bob Gandara, who initially called me, he read one of the stories and said, "I can offer La Raza sewing classes. I have sewing machines for women."

We said, "Yeah, that's great. We need more garment workers, below-minimum-wage type of thing."

He says, "Hey, could you meet me over in Hollywood?" I drove over to Hollywood and sat down with Bob, and initially I saw Bob more as a guy that was trying to sell sewing machines. We had discussions and eventually he got hooked and came over and joined us at La Raza.

I consider every person as an asset. Some people can provide us with paper for the mimeograph machine. Some people are thugs, but they can provide us with muscle if we need them. Some people are brilliant, good writers. Some people are eloquent, good speakers, and you're always looking for leadership. I never considered myself in the role of a leader. I considered myself in a role of an organizer, and my whole base was in psychology. My analysis of coming in was basically that here that we have a community of which I was born in, of which I am a member, and our self-worth ain't worth a damn. Using Maslow's triangle base of hierarchy of needs, that we were still addressing the basics like primitive, food, shelter, and clothing, and that before we got to education and some of the other finer things in life where you really feel that your self-worth is at its fullest, that we had to start at the lowest scale first and address some of those needs. So I used that as part of organizing tools.

ESPINO

Do you remember when you realized that you wanted to spend your energy doing this? Because the two interviews before, you talk about your focus on your goals, avoiding distractions, avoiding falling in love, and then here you are now focusing on the—

RAZO

Here I am married with one—

ESPINO

No, the Chicano Movement. You are married?

RAZO

First I got married.

ESPINO

Yes, you told me that story.

RAZO

Then I had a kid. Then my mom called me up and she said, “Joe, if you can do it, I can do it,” and she went back to school.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

And went to East L.A. College, became a vocational nurse, and went to work for Dr. Carlo at the First Street Medical Center and divorced my father. She was taking big steps on her own. I said, “Great. Great. Se le prendio el foco.” All it takes is one in the family to break part of the poverty cycle, and then others start saying, “We can do it too.”

The more I got involved in the movement, the more time I spent at the office, and I still had high hopes of going after a Ph.D. and being a clinical psychologist, but I was finding it more difficult because I had one foot in as a family man, and I had one foot in La Raza, and then I had my other foot in school, and then I had a foot in trying to earn a living for my family.

My wife, doing part-time teaching with a kid, and we were taking the kid to the babysitter and transporting him back, a one-car type of family, and there were times when I would have to pick her up from school. She was teaching for a while here at the projects at Belvedere, and the principal would advise all the teachers that they should leave at three o’clock because it was not safe for them to hang around. There had been too many break-ins and so forth. So I had to make sure that I’d drive the car and pick her up there and take her back home. We were living in El Sereno.

But, again, when eventually through Art Snyder and the poverty program that I ran for getting jobs for kids and then eventually moving on there to La Raza, I just—doing more research, I didn’t like the results of that research because I was seeing more the impact that it was having on the community with a 50 percent dropout rate. Then I remembered

some of my stuff when I was in high school, that very few of us were in academic classes, that most of them were in industrial art classes, which meant you were going to be a carpenter, a machinist. They weren't really pushing people to go into the academics, although if the student wanted it, they could just say yes, but the counseling was not there to try and push people there.

The more I kept recruiting people to come into La Raza, the more I started saying, "Obviously we're not being trained, and I'll have to use whatever knowledge I have from psychology to reach out to people and bring them in." And I started using what I would call the hubcap theory of organizing, and that is a hubcap has a radiating spokes. I would look for people who were attached to organizations and who had access to bodies in those organizations, people like Ricardo Martinez, who was a student at LACC. Ricardo was married to Lily Martinez and he had two kids, but he was a student there. So I reached out to him, brought him to La Raza, or he came voluntarily, I can't remember which, but then started radicalizing him, knowing that eventually when we needed bodies, all I would have to do is put out the word to Ricardo. He would be able to get the students from LACC and bring them over.

The same with East L.A. College and then some of the local organizations. Shorty from El Jardin, who belonged to a gang there. He had a whole bunch of gang members, and Shorty adapted real quick to the movement. Trini from South L.A., same thing. Frank Martinez from South L.A., various people, just picking them up, and little by little these guys started hanging around at La Raza.

ESPINO

Did they have other responsibilities?

RAZO

Oh, yes, everyone worked. Everyone worked.

ESPINO

Before we go that far, when I talked to Ruth, she says it was basically her and Risco doing everything.

RAZO

Yes, initially, yes.

ESPINO

I asked her, after I interviewed Raul, I started calling it the La Raza collective, because it sounded like there were a group of people working together, organizing, kind of like what you're describing.

RAZO

No.

ESPINO

She said, “No, I wouldn’t call it a collective.

RAZO

No, no, no. The only two persons that were there when I—and I wouldn’t say it was just her and Risco. There were more persons when I got there. There was Eleazar and there was Ruth Robinson, and they were the first ones that started. But there was another guy that used to hang around the church, a semi-Vato Loco, Henry Gomez, and he had an uncle that was more middle-age. Henry was a youngster, maybe eighteen, nineteen. Benny Luna was around, and Benny was—I wouldn’t call him a Vato Loco, but he was a poet, a writer. He wanted to write a book on Chicanos. He was writing his own novel on Oscar Acosta.

There was Virginia, who used to take care of the church for Father Luce, housekeeping, a little of everything. She was already there. There was another Güera that was there, I forget her name, and she used to do the same thing, more in the ministry part. There was Father Garver, who was an assistant priest to Father Luce. There was Father Edwards, who was a lawyer, and also another assistant priest to Father Luce. They all did the liberation theology of going out in the field to talk to people, rather than waiting for the people to come to the church.

The Sal Castros were already aware of La Raza, because he used to come. I used to see him maybe about twice a month, but they weren’t regulars. The regulars there were Eli, Ruth, Benny Luna, and Benny Luna brought his brother-in-law, Ernie Gutierrez, who was a teacher at one of the school, and he brought his wife, Olga Gutierrez, who was also a teacher. There were people, but they weren’t hanging out there on a daily basis.

The only ones I saw on a daily basis were maybe Eli and Ruth and Benny. Benny [Spanish phrase], he was also a joker. Because we were located in the basement, and he used to put on Father Luce’s cloak and go out and bless some of us, and sometimes he’d get into Father Luce’s wine.

Every once in a while we got the Moctesuma Esparzas, and obviously contact had already been made with Juan Gomez and some of the UCLA people, because they were there. They had obviously known about La Raza before I got there, and when Juan appeared with five, ten people, I didn’t know who Juan was. Obviously, some contact, some groundwork had already been done by Eli and Ruth, principally by Eli, because Ruth also had the stigma that Devra suffered from, and it’s sort of, “I’m Anglo. What am I doing here in a—so my credibility isn’t—,” you know.

I kept telling the people, and that’s why I differ with the attitude of many of the people, that Chicanoism to me, or being a Chicano is a state of mind. It’s not a birthright. Some Anglos and blacks are more Chicanos than some people who were born Mexican. So I used

to say, “Hey, go out there and speak, and you are an authority. You don’t stand back in the shadows and say, ‘I can’t do that because I’m an Anglo.’”

ESPINO

She would say that? Or Devra would say that or Ruth would say?

RAZO

Well, Devra, yes. And many times when I was confronting Raul, “Well, Joe, I’m still not a brown face.”

And you say, “That’s bullshit. You’re browner than many of the people we’ve had in the movement.”

Unfortunately, that’s typical, and they got that stigma also from within the movement when we started going on to the topic Brown Power, very similar to Black Power, and you can’t be an Oreo, black on the outside, white on the inside. So once you start dealing with those psychological concepts of Brown Power and the different shades of brown, and “I’m browner than you are,” which means I’m more macho, and the honorific and glorification of the male model as a warrior, the revolutionary and las Tontas son las Adelitas that are hanging onto the coattail of the horses following their men onto war, they’re never on top of the horse and they’re never the ones that are armed with the Bandoleras. They’re always in a subservient role. Well, I felt that the Devras and the Ruths were also taking that back row, and the Farm Workers were also experiencing that kind of problem that was just surfacing later on. Eventually that’s why they also broke up.

ESPINO

Because of the white influence?

RAZO

They were nationalists. Dolores Huerta were nationalists. “We do not have brown faces. We are suffering from discrimination, the same disparity within our movement. All the lawyers are who? White. Why haven’t we recruited Chicano lawyers?” Because the Chicano lawyers that were graduating were going after money. You don’t spend that many years in law school to go on and be paid five dollars or fifty. The lawyers were getting a different wage than the Farm Workers were. The organizers were getting five bucks an hour or five bucks a month or whatever the heck it was, something like that. I mean, it was peon wages. But the lawyers were getting fifty or a hundred bucks.

Jerry—I forget Jerry’s last name—and his group of lawyers were getting much better wages, much better working conditions. They were the brain trust of the Farm Workers. The Chris Meyers, a lot of the role models, and the Mark Days that were helping organize for Cesar Chavez were all white. Eventually, like the Gandhi Movement, you have a leader, and then everyone who is white and leans that way comes over, provides services. They have the expertise, the organizational input, and the contacts, the linkages, and they provide all the

basic foundation for the organizations.

After a while, the organization moves up, matures, and they start saying, “Hey, we want the leadership roles,” and so then they start putting pressure, and the fights start coming in internally, and they start moving. “When are we going to get our chance to be trained as leaders?” and they start moving the whites out. That’s what happened to the UFW.

ESPINO

It seems that, though, here in Los Angeles, whites were always looked at the enemy on paper and in the rhetoric.

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

Not only that, but also men were going to be the ones to be the spokespeople, although you had Alicia Escalante, who was very visible as a spokesperson, as a leader. But it seems something different was happening here in Los Angeles than what was happening up in the San Joaquin Valley, but at the same time it sounds very contradictory, because here you have all these white people supporting the movement, and yet you have all his rhetoric in La Causa, and I’m not sure if La Raza. I haven’t had a chance to look at all the La Raza newspapers. I haven’t seen very many of them, to tell you the truth. I know Chicano Studies has them in the library, but they haven’t put them all in order.

RAZO

Right. La Causa, I think, was a little more extreme than we were in terms of the point of view. Again, what people have to recognize—and, unfortunately, it’s hard to do that, and again I go back to my roots, and my roots were in psychology—when a community has been oppressed as much as we have been oppressed or the blacks have been oppressed, all the hostility and anger is turned inward: the drugs, domestic violence, the gangs, the killing of each other, the organizing against one another, of never letting anyone climb up the ladder. You bring them down because they have to remain at the same level that you’re at so you can feed off one another. You don’t get out of that violent stage until you turn your anger outside of the community. The tactics that I was using and many others were using, whether they knew it knowingly or unknowingly, was to direct that anger. The movement was a catharsis, and to me I equated that movement with group therapy. It was group therapy for the community. We sit around a big table with hundreds of thousands of people, and we say, “Okay, what are your problems?”

“The goddamn police, they did this, they did that.”

“What are your problems?”

"The educational system, they did this, they did that."

"How about the church?"

"Oh, the church. You realize they don't have women priests? They don't have any. All they do is ask us for a toston (half a dollar; money), that you ride limousines, and they don't do a damn thing for us."

Those were the channels that we were choosing. The channels that I was choosing. I was already thinking, "Okay, we've got this internal anger. Now how can I channel that hostility outward?" You have to start with the basic premise first, you have to know who you are, and once you know who you are, then you can reach out and hold hands with others. If you don't know who you are and if you have that anger inside, you're going to channel that anger to the persons nearest to you, and those are the people that live in your community.

ESPINO

How many people do you think reached that level of understanding, though, that were in the movement?

RAZO

I think very few, very few.

ESPINO

Did you have it at that time in the late sixties?

RAZO

I had it from that time. My background was in psychology and I had taken classes and group therapy, and I had done marriage counseling and so forth, and I wasn't learning tools to organize. I was using those tools from psychology, of directing my stories and choosing alternatives out there that we can direct that anger, those hostile feelings, so that people can feel good about themselves. "How come you're so screwed up?"

"Well, the educational system screwed me up." That might not be necessarily true, but we were giving people alternatives so that they could come to the realization that, "Hey, maybe they did screw me up, and I don't have to take it out on Jose or Jaime. I can take it outward—all my anger is directed."

And who are those people there? Who's leading them? Well, the white people, of course. White-run institutions. So that's how you turn it around, and you turn it in the way of saying institutional racism, white racism. But those are tactics. That's the spin you put into it. It's no different than running a political campaign. You're putting a spin on it. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's entirely true.

ESPINO

But did you meet people in the movement who've had real hate toward whites?

RAZO

Yes, yes. I even met an individual who was married, like me, to a white, and he came to me one day, and he was older than I was, and he says, "Joe, I'm divorcing my wife."

And I said, "You're doing what? How long have you been married?"

"Oh, about twenty-five years."

"Why are you divorcing your wife? What's happening, man?"

"Well, I just came to the realization that she's racist."

And I said, "Damn. You know what? Don't use us an excuse to dump your wife. If you've been married for twenty-five years and you didn't know she was racist, how the hell did you find out now, being with us for a number of months, that now all of a sudden she's racist? So don't use the movement as an excuse for your own pendejadas." Yes, that's extreme for somebody.

ESPINO

I can see the point of the political tactic, but just from the things that I've read and from that period, it seems like they were viewed, even if you got money from—say Rona Fields gave money to Brown Berets, she was still on the paper as a white paper, represented the demon, represented the cause of all—

RAZO

And everyone used Rona from A to Z. Here's a white person with a Ph.D., psychologist, let's bed her, and that's the way we get even.

ESPINO

Oh, jeez.

RAZO

And they didn't put it in those words, but psychologically that's the way I interpret it, and she's not the only one.

ESPINO

I thought she was married.

RAZO

She was, and then broke up, and then she picked up a boyfriend, and then her boyfriend, live-in boyfriend—she was living in Altadena. She was Jewish, and then he hooked up with a German girl from Germany, and she said, “Of all the damned—.” So you talk about everyone has biases, and she didn’t mind if he hooked up with someone else, but, “Goddamn, with a German, how dare he?” And he left her. But she tried doing a lot of good things for me.

ESPINO

For you?

RAZO

Yes, yes.

ESPINO

Oh, because you were in the same field.

RAZO

I was in the movement, but she tried getting me into a Ph.D. program over at USC, and we were coming pretty close to it. I remember the day that—because I was speaking to a number of people in an audience that she had gathered, and that was the day that was a turning point for me. I indicated to the audience that I had reached a point in my life whether I was going to pursue my academic goals or whether I was going to organize, and I chose organizing. So it was an emotional moment for me.

But she was good in that sense, and she did help the Brown Berets. She tried in many ways to help David. She saw something in David. And all at the same time, you could say she also used them, because that was her Ph.D. thesis. She called me as recently as about a year ago and she wanted—she freelances, can’t seem to stay in a job very long.

ESPINO

Like as a consultant?

RAZO

As a consultant. So she wanted to float proposals, and she wanted me to go in with her on a number of proposals because she needed a brown face and I had the contacts in the movement and could I get hold of some of the people, because some of the Brown Berets were no longer meeting. They seemed to be cancelling out on meetings with her. She was over in the Westside. Finally I just had to tell her, “Hey, I’m not going to be the front, and I’m not your bagman type of thing.” I don’t know what she’s into now, but that’s the way

she makes her living.

ESPINO

Wow. Well, that idea that she was used sexually and for her money and for her house, apparently they would go to her place, apparently it was a palace with a pool. The Brown Berets would go there and have a great time.

RAZO

But at that time, she still had her boyfriend.

ESPINO

But I'm saying she was used for a lot of different reasons.

RAZO

Oh, yes.

ESPINO

Then you said something about how men—you saw it as they were using it in a way to conquer the enemy or—Eldridge Cleaver said the same thing.

RAZO

And I saw this not just with her. I saw this with [unclear] and whether it would be with Juan and Raul and maybe Antonio. After a while you see a pattern where people would get passed over from one group to another, and those persons are trying to find their role in life. Again, I keep going to my basic self-worth. If your self-worth is solid, if you have the foundation, hell with all of you. I don't need you. I will do my own thing.

When I came into the movement, I pretty much knew what my self-worth was, from my training, not necessarily that all of a sudden I got smart because I joined the movement. Many of the people in the movement didn't know whether they were left-handed or right-handed, and they were trying to find bearings. They hadn't matured. Most of us that do that, do that with the type of training that I received, or we receive that type of training very late in our life when we get old and our grandfathers and grandmothers always said, "Oh, let me tell you, [Spanish word]. If I had to do this, I would do it different if I had to live it over again, and let me tell you the things that I've learned about life." Then they pass on their whole wisdom. Well, some of us learn it quicker than others, and some of us learn it through the school of hard knocks.

ESPINO

Do you think that they were taken advantage of, or do you think that they had some agency in those kinds of relationships?

RAZO

I think it was a combination of both. I think they got something out of it, and at the same time, some of the people were taken advantage of. I remember—and this wasn't a white person, this was a Latina that was a schoolteacher and a pretty young lady, I don't know how she came to come to La Raza, but she used to hang around there. After a while, even the outside groups, Mascarones or whoever came in, would always hit on her. I finally had to sit down with her and say, "Hey, what's happening? You just can't do this. I mean, we're not running a brothel."

ESPINO

They would do it right there in the church?

RAZO

No, no, not, no. That's when we were at City Terrace.

ESPINO

They would use that place as a—

RAZO

No, no, I mean, they would use it. Some of the people would come in and try and use it as a pickup place. "You have females. Let's hang around there."

And those are the people that you say, "Hey, move it somewhere else."

So much stuff that was happening dynamically from personalities and psychologically and sociologically, and you have Maoists, Marxists, Socialists, everyone with different ideologies. That came on later just when I was leaving, but I kept getting feedback.

ESPINO

Did you ever hear about the Free Clinic being used in that way, as a pickup place or place to take your girlfriends or women friends later in the evening after the clinic had closed?

RAZO

No. The Free Clinic for the Brown Berets came almost 1970, just when I had one foot in the door and one out the door. So many of those things occurred afterwards.

At La Raza, at least, there was very little drinking at the church, although there were a number of white women that did come around. The county librarian at the Lincoln Heights library would come over, and her husband was in Hawaii, and she had been here for a year or two years at the library. Eventually some of the people went after her and did what they—yes. But the linkups were there. A lot of people wanted it like when they wanted to touch base with the Farm Workers. "We want to touch what's happening here." And we had some

inkling of that too.

ESPINO

What does that mean?

RAZO

Well, they were coming in and using it to meet people, and sometimes it wasn't the men, sometimes it's the women that come in to thrive in the excitement that's occurring.

ESPINO

So you're saying they didn't have a true consciousness about the issues?

RAZO

No. Some of the people that came in, no. Many of them did, they wanted to know what was happening, and some of the people were assertive. There were a couple of nurses that came in when I was at City Terrace, and they were open about their purpose after they saw us in action. One just came out and said, "I want you." A Filipina registered nurse.

I said, "We can use your service when someone gets shot or something."

ESPINO

There's so much literature now about that period, and when you read things about, for example, what was happening in the white activists, it's looked at as an openness and a sexual liberation. The way you're describing the relationships, it doesn't sound like this was liberating.

RAZO

Well, depending on what state of mind and where the people were at, it could also be, because at the same time, for example, when we were in Católicos Por La Raza—and I haven't taken the movements chronologically yet. But when we were in Católicos Por La Raza, the Immaculate Heart nuns started coming over, because we were publishing papers about the church. The Immaculate Heart nuns were having a problem with the cardinal and with the pope. They were out establishing thrift stores, ministering to the poor in the community, not wearing their vestments. They were also teachers at the high schools and the colleges. They had a large number of nuns, and they were in a quarrel with the papacy and the cardinal who wanted them in the church, tending to the flock in the church, not out in the community. There were tremendous tensions between both of them. They joined us in Católicos Por La Raza, and they had been told before that, "If you keep this up, we're going to kick you out of the church." They were given mandates, and many of them just chose to ignore it.

During that time, there were a number of ex-priests, too, and other ministers from other churches that were also involved with us. We leaned heavily on a lot of religious people, not

only for finances but for organizational purposes, for bodies. Eventually, after Católicos Por La Raza, many of the priests had already left the priesthood, but they were still dressing in their garments. Many of the nuns left the priesthood, yet they kept coming to us. Then they started going through desensitization, almost like group therapy, where one of the ministers—and I forgot his name; he's a Methodist minister—decided that they would have a collective and they would all live together in a house and to break down the brainwashing that had been going on. It was a free-for-all. So they went from being strict nuns in a Catholic setting—

ESPINO

Married to God.

RAZO

—to married to everyone.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

Then having the round-circle rituals of protests and breaking down the codes of behavior that they had been brainwashed. It was a hell of a mess. The reason I know that is because they asked me to speak to many of the white youth, and that's the way I used to get a lot of the funds for La Raza. I would get paid every weekend x number of dollars. They would bring in upper- or middle-class white kids, and they deprived them of sleep for two days, starting from Friday night through Saturday, and they would take them to the barrios, the black community, all sorts of agendas that they had set up for them. Then they would bring them to me, and I was one of the speakers. They spent one hour with me. The poor kids would be on the floor, and some were just nodding off, and then they would, "What the heck are you doing? You're not giving them—show any courtesy." Well, of course, if you haven't slept for forty-eight hours, pretty soon you're going to start hallucinating. Usually you'll hallucinate at about seventy-two hours of lack of sleep. This was a way of breaking down the barriers and sensitizing them to the needs of the community.

ESPINO

That was a religious program or a religious project?

RAZO

Yes, that these ministers themselves put together, along with some of the nuns. Then some of the nuns married the ex-priests, ex-ministers, had kids, got divorced. Some went to Canada. And some of the women they were just beautiful people inside, I mean, they were pure when they started. But something got hold of them and they brainwashed them and said, "This is what you need to be free, to really be free."

ESPINO

What was your objective with La Raza? Because I think the idea for many people at that time was to be free, it was to free yourself, it was to have your mind be free, to have justice and equality and that sense of freedom, being that you could have education and quality jobs and housing and health and all of those things.

RAZO

Like I said, I was twenty-nine, so I had already been in through the air force. I had been through a hell of a lot of poverty, and I had been out on the streets and knew what the streets were like, and I did not come in with my eyes closed. I did not come in to be led by the nose either. I came in with my eyes open, and I knew what I wanted to do. So I'm not going to buy a line of shit from anyone until I see whether, like Bob Gandara, they're trying to sell me sewing machines, that we need more garment workers.

This is my whole problem with a lot of the new generation that we have and the old generation that we had before. We don't teach people, and maybe this should be a requirement in college, that you take a year of critical thinking. Just because you hear something on the news or just because you read it in the newspaper or just because you read it in a book, it's not gospel truth. Many of our people were buying many concepts hook, line, and sinker. It was like going into a fishing pond and just throwing a hook, and whatever hook was being thrown, you pulled out a fish. That wasn't my goal.

ESPINO

What was your goal?

RAZO

My goal was—and I was not a nationalist and I was not a Maoist, I was not a Marxist. From being in the air force and seeing all the jets and from all the airbases and seeing the people going to Little Rock, Arkansas, and so forth, nationalism was a good line to preach to get the people together. That doesn't mean that ultimately all of a sudden East L.A. is going to incorporate and become a city on its own and be able to sustain itself, or that La Raza Unida is going to become a viable party and become a third party. We already had the Peace and Freedom Party before. We already had the Progressive Labor Party before. There were a lot of political parties that started as third-party basis, and they had all failed. So all of a sudden, we're going to succeed as La Raza Unida? I saw those as tactics rather than as realities. Many of the people saw them as end goals, and, again, it's that spectrum in the ruler, that says, "Where is brown-ness at? Where are you at?"

Nationalists would say, "I'm at the very, very brown end of that ruler. Joe, you're a Mexican American who still wants a piece of the institution, and you're at this end. And people who work for the county, city, state, and so forth, [Spanish word]." They're the Oreo cookie, except they're brown on the outside and white on the inside. Why? Because they're contingent upon working for government and they're being subsidized by government and they're being paid, and that includes teachers who work for the state or anyone. So we had everyone on that scale from one to twelve, on that one-foot inch ruler.

To me, I used my psychology as tactics, and I saw nationalism as a tactic. I saw La Raza Unida as a tactic. I saw many of the concepts that we brought into it as tactics, not necessarily as the end run, as the end goal, but as tactics to get the concessions that we wanted without losing your identity. I feel that you can be part of the system without losing your identity and still be able to call your shots. But the system, or the white establishment, the institutional racism is not going to pay attention to it until you knock it over the head, and those concepts are going to knock them onto their head. Whether it be nationalism, whether it's walking out the kids from school, whether it's people blowing up police cars, whether it's people being martyrs, those are all going to the end role of saying, "We want to be included, and if you don't include us, we will take part of your institutions away from you, and we will do it on our own terms."

To me, that's what we were doing in the Chicano Movement. And I never said that openly to anyone, obviously, in the movement, because other people thought, "We're going to be nationalists. We're going to incorporate East L.A." How the hell can you incorporate East L.A. when in essence you don't have the economic base to be able to do it? You don't have the industry to pay for City Hall, your own police force. All you have to do is do the research, but people didn't have those tools to be able to do the research. Or how are we going to adopt the Plan de Aztlán? And the author of Plan de Aztlán was really Quinones. He was the one that was working on it. It was not Luis Valdez.

ESPINO

The one in Santa Barbara, that plan?

RAZO

Yes, yes, that was Juan. That was Juan's concept, Aztlán, the Plan de Aztlán. I mean, he was the one that he has a very good mind.

ESPINO

You didn't embrace that concept?

RAZO

Yes, I embraced it as an organizing concept. I embraced everything as an organizing concept. As an end goal, hell, no, it ain't gonna happen. We are part of the United States, and I don't say we're part of America, because I consider America to be a continent, not the United States. Mexicans are Americans. Canadians are Americans. South America, they're Americans. But, unfortunately, we equate everything to when we say Americans, it means strictly the people from the United States, and those were the things that we needed to put out more in the news and get across to our people. America means everyone, the whole continent, not people in the United States or not only the white people can call themselves Americans. We are all Americans.

My goal was always that we as Chicanos are going to get a piece of the system, but we're going to do it with our own identity and we're going to do it in our terms, or we will knock the system down. Now, I also knew we weren't going to knock the system down, but we

would certainly make a dent in it. And if you look at it now, that is exactly what we have done. We have made a dent. We have not really made a breakthrough. We have made a dent. There was an article in the L.A. Times about a week ago on the legal system. I don't know if you read it. It says we're close to 40 percent of the population—

ESPINO

In prison, incarcerated.

RAZO

Yes, we have 8 percent of the judges or 6 percent of the lawyers, and it goes on and on with statistics. Well, it's the same thing with engineers. We have more teachers than we have had before. We have more administrators than we have before. We finally have a mayor who has the same name that we do, but we still don't have a governor. And not only that, we lost the seat we had in the California Supreme Court when Governor Brown—now we have two Asians on the Supreme Court, and one of those spots was the spot we had before. There's still a lot, a lot of work to do.

But all of us think that we have accomplished so many things, and why is that? We fooled ourselves when we were in the movement too. People used to say, "Look at what we did. We walked out 10,000 kids. We got Católicos Por La Raza. God, look at what we did at St. Basil. Look at the Chicano Moratoriums. We burned down some buildings. We confronted the cops. Look at what we've done." Well, the people that are saying that are only talking to the people in the movement, and so we say, "Look at—." Boy, we keep reinforcing each other. [Spanish phrase]. "Look, boy, we have really done great things." The truth is, is that we made a dent. We have not really broken into the system.

And how are we accomplishing that? We are accomplishing many of the things that we have done and that we're still doing by sheer numbers. So what are we doing? We're having more babies, more babies, more immigration. Hey, none of us want the borders closed. Let them all come over, you know. We're going to take over this system by sheer numbers. Now we have Chicanos in Michigan, we have them in Chicago, we have them everywhere, just sheer numbers. Ultimately they're going to pay the price, because we don't have the resources to deal with over population. I won't see that in my lifetime, but my generation, my kids, and their kids will see it. We won't have the resources to take care of the sheer numbers. Yes, we may control the whole United States in terms of votes and by numbers. That's how we become powerhouse.

You never hear any Latino legislators saying, "Close the borders." They say that more we have, even though very few of our people vote, the more we have by sheer numbers will get the percentages we need to stay in power and to move on to a higher office, and eventually we'll take the presidency. How? Sheer numbers.

But how about the other people that are on the lower class? Who's going to be taking care of them? We have to provide them with jobs, education, health, all the economics. We dealt with that issue with the Sierra Club, because I've been a member of the Sierra Club ever

since I was in college, and population control. How do you deal with those problems? And they couldn't get a Chicano on any committee. Even the Sierra Club was afraid to take on the legislators dealing with the population issue, because they knew that no Hispanic or no Latino politician or Chicano politician, depending upon their politics, would deal with that issue. There are tremendous problems that we have on our hands that people haven't even addressed.

ESPINO

But you did bring up something that relates to the Chicano Movement and to ideas from that period, and that is, is it just enough to have somebody Latino elected or Chicano elected?

RAZO

And I say no, and I kept pointing that out to people, all we have to do is look across the border, you know. Look at all the brown faces that run Mexico or Panama, Nicaragua, and Peru and all those places. I mean, why are those countries so poor? Why are some of them functioning as third-world countries? I have always said I'd rather have a white man that is sensitive to the needs of the people than a brown man who isn't sensitive in that position of power. So don't close your eyes and have a very narrow focus and just elect someone. All we have to do is look at the cities of Bell, the Cudahys, those type of cities, the Southgates, that have launched the turmoil that we had.

ESPINO

But at the time, at the moment back then in '69, '70, did you have those feelings?]

RAZO

Oh, yes, with a number of people. I probably would have left the country if Oscar Acosta had been elected sheriff.

ESPINO

You were in opposition to his—

RAZO

No, I was not in opposition. I just knew what Oscar was.

ESPINO

What was he?

RAZO

Well, I mean, everything from A to Z, drug fiend, you know. I mean, that's just part of it, a lot of other stuff, domestic abuse too. These were people that we needed at that moment. And similar to what happened in Cuba, one of the first acts that Fidel did after he won his revolution and threw out Batista was within a few months he killed a lot of his own men.

They were great guerilla fighters, but they were going to be terrible administrators and they were going to be a threat to his rule, period.

ESPINO

You came across people like that in the movement?

RAZO

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. Sometimes you have to prop up people and you can't reveal what you know about them because they are useful for that moment and that purpose, but I would certainly not vote for them to rule a state or a territory or a city, or, like I mentioned to you, that individual that said, "The community can certainly reward me for my efforts by giving me a Rolex watch," and played a very prominent role in the movement.

So, again, sometimes you think you're running a political campaign, Obama or Romney, depending upon who's putting the spin on it afterwards, and at the same time you don't want to lie to the people, but if all of us reveal what we really knew, then you might not have a movement, because all of us fall from that high chair and we have to stumble and get up again.

ESPINO

Then your biggest criticisms of Risco would be then—

RAZO

No, I didn't have criticism with Risco. My problem with Risco is that he really wasn't open. I had no personal quarrels with Risco.

ESPINO

I mean, as far as an organizer, because it sounds like you were saying he didn't show real leadership, he wasn't bringing in people, that you took on that role to bring in people.

RAZO

No. He had already brought in some people from before. No, I was certainly not the sole recruiter. Everyone was bringing people in, and I asked some of the people and they indicated to me that Risco really did not have an organizing background when he was with the Farm Workers. That surprised me, and I said, "Well, what do you base your information on?" They couldn't base the information on, so I don't know if he was an organizer with Cesar or how long he had been with him.

ESPINO

Or what role did he play when he was there.

RAZO

Or what role he played or what role Ruth played with them. But he had hinted before that he was looking for a living wage when he joined La Raza, and he certainly wasn't getting it from the Farm Workers. But Eli had contacts, and many of his contacts were through Father Luce. No, Eli played the role when you asked him a question of importance. He would reply by saying, "Hmm, okay, yeah, that's interesting. Yeah. Mm-hmm."

"What the hell does that mean, Eli?" But I respected him. And you find that with many of the people when you're in the army, navy, or any of the armed forces. They give you information on a need-to-know basis, and if I think you don't need to know it, you're not going to know it. I got more feedback from Ruth, more positive reinforcement from Ruth, than from Eli.

When the walkouts had not occurred, we had meetings and meetings, and I really never knew what Sal was doing, other than saying, "We're not ready." It appeared to me that many of the kids in different schools were acting independently. When I recruited Raul, Raul was working for Inside Eastside, which is a car club newspaper, three or four pages, and they were more into social events than anything. I spoke to him and told him about some of my ideas and that we needed a younger voice to address the kids and to go political. Raul started coming over and seeing what was happening. He has a different interpretation now than the interpretation I have. His interpretation is that he didn't come over. His interpretation is that when the walkouts occurred, he was not part of La Raza, that he was still with Inside Eastside.

ESPINO

Can you take me to the very, very beginning when you first heard about the idea of the students walking out? Do you recall, was that after that Lincoln High School meeting that you spoke at regarding police abuse?

RAZO

I heard about the blowouts and saw it on a sidewalk. The idea did not come from me. The idea had already been planted by someone else, and I don't know whether it was Sal or whether it was Eli or whoever ever came up with the idea.

ESPINO

Or the Brown Berets or the YCC?

RAZO

No, there were no Brown Berets at that time.

ESPINO

David Sanchez and Vicki Castro with the YACC?

RAZO

It's possible, but I don't think so.

ESPINO

You said you saw it on the sidewalk. You mean you saw it written on the sidewalk?

RAZO

Yes. Someone had written it, like graffiti near Lincoln High School, "Blowout." When I came in, that concept was already—

ESPINO

Already in '67?

RAZO

Yes. Already being pushed.

ESPINO

Almost a year before it actually happened?

RAZO

Yes, and I don't know if it was just isolated, but the concept, someone had come up with it. I don't know who the originator was, but it was already planted in the kids' mind.

ESPINO

Then what role did you take?

RAZO

Recruiting Raul and others, because I had spoken to Eli and said, "I don't see a lot of young people here, and we need someone." We, he and I, were more addressing community people and college kids and said, "We have to get into the mind of the kids, and the same way that we're doing with the La Raza, we need to do it with a newspaper that's oriented toward the students."

ESPINO

How did you find Raul? Because of the paper?

RAZO

Yes, I found a copy of the Inside Eastside, and I said, "Jeez." That was Jimmy Franco and, I think, Victor Franco, brothers, and I'm still in contact with them because they have their own paper and very good writers, very good writers. I went over to their place, and I can remember meeting Jimmy, or I met one of them and talked to him. I wasn't going for Raul.

I was just going to talk to them generally. They said that's not where their head was at, that their paper social newspaper and they were into that. We were too left field for them. That, and I talked to Raul, who must have been there, and said, "Come around," and I think he came around a couple of times, and I said, "We need someone to talk to the kids, and what are these guys accomplishing riding up and down the boulevard, except wasting gas? What we need to do is politicize some of these kids."

And I said, "We can set you up," after I spoke to Risco, "with a newspaper of your own, so long as you address it to some of the issues that we face in the community and do it at the high school level.

I don't recall him saying, "Yeah, that sounds good." He says, "Well, I'm not—." I think he was having some problems within Inside Eastside too.

So I used that as a means of luring him over, and he came over and I introduced him to Ruth. They hit it right, because later on they did hit it right, that interfered with—but Eli was already doing his thing elsewhere. But that's part of very early in the game. Eventually she showed him the layouts and so forth, and he started putting things together. I don't think he had published an issue already when the walkouts occurred.

ESPINO

That was called, that periodical or that—

RAZO

Chicano Students Newspaper.

ESPINO

Chicano Student Newspaper, yes. That was the piece that was the first time Chicano was ever—

RAZO

Or Chicano Student Movement Newspaper, something like that.

ESPINO

Yes. The first time Chicano was used on the masthead or on the logo.

RAZO

Right, but everyone had already started calling themselves Chicanos, so it didn't come from Raul.

ESPINO

Right.

RAZO

Again, everyone was still talking about blowouts, and it wasn't happening.

ESPINO

But was it your idea to start the student newspapers from using the presses and the equipment at La Raza to start running a—

RAZO

Yes, yes.

ESPINO

Then Ruth told me that she also did the typesetting every once in a while for—

RAZO

She did everything for both.

ESPINO

But for Con Safos.

RAZO

Con Safos, I can't recall. I recall reading Con Safos, but I didn't know if she had done the—and I did not come out with the name of Chicano Student Newspaper. All I told Raul is, "We can fund a newspaper that's addressed to the students."

ESPINO

The youth, yes.

RAZO

He's probably the one that came out with the name for the newspapers.

ESPINO

So he was amenable to that idea. In contrast to the other gentlemen you mentioned, Raul was receptive to a more militant—

RAZO

Initially, he was sort of, "Well, let me go see what it's all about."

ESPINO

Suspicious.

RAZO

Noncommittal. But after a couple times, he says, Yes.

I tried walking out the kids by myself. I went to Garfield High School.

ESPINO

You did?

RAZO

Yes. I've always been in a hurry to do things. At times I can even get close to being impulsive. I kept hearing people saying, "Blowout, walkout, walkout," and coming out with stories, and said, "Well, when is it going to happen?"

"Well, we're not ready yet. The stars have to be aligned a certain way, and the moon has to be aligned." And many times it's because people are scared, because people don't have the backbone. If they're going to do everything according to organization, then they may as well publish it and send it to everyone and say, "We are walking out at such-and-such a day," and that's not the way you—

ESPINO

You didn't see that as effective.

RAZO

No. That's the way you alert authorities, but that's, I mean, just common sense to me. For some reason or another, I seem to have the knack of being able to organize. It just came easy.

I went one day to Garfield High School, which is my high school since I graduated from there, and I walked into the campus, and I started shouting, "Walkout! Walkout!"

And the kids just ignored me like, "Who the hell is that old man?"

ESPINO

Who is this? [laughs]

RAZO

Well, at age twenty-nine, you're an old man.

ESPINO

It's true, to a sixteen-year-old or a fifteen-year-old.

RAZO

Like, "What's this?" So I quickly found out that the kids were not going to follow me, and so I left.

ESPINO

No one approached you?

RAZO

No one. I mean, no. Kids didn't even gather around me.

ESPINO

Because that's when you have Margarita Cuaron and Harry Gamboa—

RAZO

Yes. So I sucked my thumb and walked out of the school all the way to my car, and said, "Well, okay. Okay."

ESPINO

That didn't work.

RAZO

"Plan B now." [laughter] I talked to the Brown Berets and basically said that's what I did. And to put it crudely, Sal and the other ones, no tiene huevos, they just don't have the backbone. They've been talking a good talk, and it's time. It's getting closer to summer, and it's coming out. I forgot which month we marched them, but we said, "We don't have too much time, and these kids are going to be out." So I left it at that.

They just said, "Oh, wow. Hmm."

And within a week, could have been within days, the Brown Berets appeared over at Garfield High School, and they were all wearing their caps, and that did it, because once they wore their caps, the kids identified with the Brown Beret symbol, and they encouraged them to walk out and the cops were called right away.

Some of the cops went after David Sanchez. Fred Lopez, who had hung around La Raza and was now with the Brown Berets, stated, "When I saw that the cops were going to get David,

I ran in front of them to distract them, and I said, “That’s Fred,” sacrificed himself, so that the prime minister wouldn’t be taken. They got Fred and they got some of the others, but apparently David Sanchez took off with the other people, and the kids walked out.

Now, at La Raza we heard about it, either through the radio or someone else. It was on the news, and then we started making some telephone calls and said, “It’s happened. We’ve got to blow them out now. We can’t wait.”

So Eleazar Risco was there at that meeting, myself, Moctesuma, Raul Ruiz, Richard Vigil, who called himself Mangas Coloradas, and a few others. I can’t remember the others.

ESPINO

No women?

RAZO

The word went out to put out the word to Castro, and I’m sure Ruth was probably around because Ruth was always in the office. But we really had very few women at that time.

We agreed to meet the next morning, we said we will meet at a certain time at Father Luce’s church at the basement, we met there, and walked about three or four blocks to Lincoln Heights on North Broadway.

ESPINO

Your access right there.

RAZO

I pointed out to the guys that my friend was across the street. He was someone I went to high school with. He was one year below me, and his name was Frank Chavez, and he was a policeman. So I said, “Watch out for Frank,” and spoke to Frank.

“Frank, how you doing?”

ESPINO

He was undercover?

RAZO

No, no, he was in uniform. Frank looked at me. He didn’t wave back.

We went out to the front of the steps, and there were a couple of undercover cops there, along with the principal from Lincoln High School. They had 8-millimeter cameras, and

someone—I guess he had a walkie-talkie or something—went up to the steps. Risco moved away from us to—everything that I've read, and sometimes that's where by being impetuous comes in, an organizer is not supposed to get arrested. An organizer is supposed to plant the seeds, put the people in places, let the leaders go and do their thing. Then when they get arrested, then the organizer organizes to bail them out, to get the parade going for demonstrations, picketing, getting the signs, organizing, putting all the pieces together on the chessboard. Well, sometimes my role moved from organizer to leader, depending upon your—

ESPINO

Your hat, your "I'm going to get arrested" hat. [laughs]

RAZO

Depending on whether I saw that people were taking the initiative. If people showed the initiative, then, yes—

ESPINO

You could back away.

RAZO

—you could go to the back. I didn't see anyone moving up the steps. We were at the bottom of the steps, and the cops were here and some kids were here. They were waiting because the signal was when we make our move, then someone pulls a fire drill bell and it goes off.

ESPINO

They were waiting for you.

RAZO

Yes, they were waiting for us to make our move.

ESPINO

Because Vicki Castro remembered that she was supposed to distract the principal. She set up a meeting with the principal.

RAZO

No, he was right at the front.

ESPINO

That would be Lincoln High School?

RAZO

Yes. I think it was the principal.

ESPINO

Was it Roosevelt? I have to listen to it again. Yes, maybe she's talking about a different school.

RAZO

We walked straight up the steps.

ESPINO

You and who else, just you?

RAZO

Me, Moctesuma.

ESPINO

Raul?

RAZO

No, Raul was a little in back of us. I didn't see Raul. But we were all there as a group. Moctesuma and Richard Vigil. Then we shouted, "Walkout. Walkout." And the cops were fuming. I was surprised they didn't start grabbing us, stop us, arrest us, or whatever. But I do not remember going all the way into the hallway. Raul says he went through the hallway and Moctesuma Esparza said he got into the hallway. But as soon as the kids saw us, they started doing their own thing, and all of a sudden, bells started ringing, and kids started coming out.

ESPINO

How did you know that they would come out that time?

RAZO

The word had already gotten out, the kids have walked out at Garfield, and all they had to do is—the truth of the matter is, is that a number of the kids walked out over educational issues. A number of the kids walked out because it was fun. It was good to go out.

The student leaders then, Freddy, jumped up on top of a car with a bullhorn and started doing his thing, and it was on. With me, what I had in mind was dealing with these kids, moving out, and getting them organized on the streets, and UCLA UMAS had already been contacted so they were ready to start walking them with picket signs and march them to the park to have a teach-in.

Me, I was already making plans to move on to the next one, because I wanted a whole bunch of schools to go out. Yes, the kids moved on. And later on when I was indicted and the court case came out and was thrown out as the conspiracy charges being too broad, they basically said in the court papers that if it had been just a number of individuals that had been charged, it would have been okay. I think, as I recall reading it, that I was one of the individuals that they said if it had been narrow, narrower than just—

ESPINO

They would have just arrested you and not someone else.

RAZO

And the other, yes, maybe Mocte and Raul. Like I said, I don't remember Raul going in, and if he went in, then the issue became with me, "If you went in, then how come you were not indicted as one of the thirteen?"

ESPINO

Yes, or arrested.

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

Was he arrested?

RAZO

No, no.

ESPINO

Did you ever come to find out why specifically you were arrested?

RAZO

Well, I was very visible. I mean, it was sort of dumb for me to take the lead and to go out up the steps. But, again, if someone else had volunteered and gone ahead of me, I certainly would have let them. But like I said, it came out to where people say, "Yeah, we want the kids to walk out," but no one wants to be that to light the fire. Sometimes it's because they're scared or they don't want to assume that leadership role. But they want to follow and then later say, "I did it." I have no problem.

ESPINO

You weren't worried about what your wife would say?

RAZO

My wife was very supportive all the way.

ESPINO

Even of you being arrested?

RAZO

And same thing with my mother-in-law. Every time I came home, we would go over what my day was like and what her day was like and what was happening. She would tell me about the fact that the expectation of teachers wasn't too high for a lot of kids she was teaching at Sheridan Elementary School, which was right near [unclear] and First Street, and the expectation was not too high. Why? They come from lower-economic-class Latinos.

ESPINO

So she was right on the ground, essentially, working with this population.

RAZO

And I had worked with her before too. I had worked before because when I was involved in a lot of psychological studies, we were doing psycho-motor studies, and our theory was that many of the kids who had not mastered a crawling stage, which was necessary in order to walk adequately, had to be regressed and go through those stages. So we built ramps and balance beams to where the kids would have to balance and all that. It's all part of brain theory and Delacco Theory and a lot of stuff that I was studying and that she started reading. Then we teamed up together, and I used my carpenter skills and would go over to the schools with the balance beams and so forth and work with her kids and that kind of stuff. We were doing interesting, innovative stuff, and we were doing it together. Yes, she knew what the risks were.

And my mother-in-law lived, at that time, in Glendale was a right-wing city in the sixties. I took a number of meetings with my mother-in-law to get her to come around, but she was very empathetic as to what I was doing, and I kept her abreast. My wife's father had already died before then, so it was just the mother and a sister. Yes, I had full support from the family and never once in our marriage did my wife say, "Joe, you're hurting the family," or "You have to stop."

ESPINO

She's an angel. [laughs]

RAZO

Oh, the best, best thing that ever happened in my life. From being born, that's the second best thing. Finding a companionship for life, and, yes, a wonderful woman.

ESPINO

Did you bring her around the La Raza offices?

RAZO

We would pass by on the corner, and she went maybe a couple of times to City Terrace, but she wasn't into, "I'm going to go protest." I also think that, like, Devra and the conchitas and so forth, the fact that she was white and the fact that we had two kids by that time and teaching took up more than her day.

ESPINO

But did you feel also like you wanted to protect her from all of that, since some of the things you were witnessing weren't so—

RAZO

No, I would have kicked ass. That's one thing. I'm a disciplinarian in terms of running an office, and when I saw nonsense going on, I wouldn't put up with it. I thought I ran a pretty good office. I kept a tight knock. It's not like after hours bring in your beers, and boys, let's—and the number of people—this wasn't over at Father Luce's, but when we were at City Terrace, a number of the local boys would come in and say, "Joe, we have hot cameras, man, cheap."

And we'd say, "No, thank you. That's all we need. We get a snitch, and before you know it, La Raza receiving hot goods. Nuh-uh. No drugs. Oscar, you want to do your thing, get the hell out and go do it at your house, or go do it in your car, but you're not going to do it here." So, no pendejadas no nothing, at least not when I was there.

ESPINO

What period would that be?

RAZO

Close to maybe '71.

ESPINO

So from '67 to '71?

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

When did you receive your B.A. from Cal State, Los Angeles?

RAZO

Sixty-five.

ESPINO

I mean your master's degree.

RAZO

I did not receive a master's.

ESPINO

You never finished it?

RAZO

No, I was six units short, my thesis.

ESPINO

Oh, it must have been right in the middle of all that that you decided to—

RAZO

Yes, yes.

ESPINO

Do you regret that decision?

RAZO

No, no. I regret not being a clinical psychologist, because working with children is still my first love. During that time, too, I was also the house father and counselor for the Episcopal Church Home as one of the part-time jobs I had for supporting the family, and these were about eight to twelve kids that were middle-school kids who were wards of the court who had been taken away from their parents because of vandalism, runaways. They just couldn't control the kids. So I was the houseparent living with the kids for three and a half days, half of the week, and then I would come back to initially my apartment with my wife, and then my home over in El Sereno when we moved over there. I was spending time there and time over here and doing counseling and taking the kids camping and helping them with the homework after school.

I was a parent, and there was a woman who had the other three and a half days. She was lax with the kids, and here I was more, "You guys have to toe the line," so sometimes we would have conflict because of her lax ways, and then the kids would have to know two ways to react to if Mom was like being a foster parent.

Some of those kids would get expelled from school because they would get into the teachers' purses and swipe their wallets. They were wayward kids. They were receiving counseling while they were there. We fed them three meals a day and taught them etiquette and manners, just like raising kids. I was used to being around kids, and in my cottage I had all boys, so I didn't have any girls. There was a girls' cottage, and I had the junior boys. During the summer months or during the holidays, we would take them special places, take them camping for a week and expose them to recreational things. In fact, that's where my wife spent her honeymoon.

ESPINO

With the kids?

RAZO

Camping trip. When we got married. I've never been one for formalities or any of that. I said, "Let's get married. Go to City Hall, get our license, and go to Justice of the Peace."

When my aunt from Texas was here, and my mother found out we were getting married, they, "No, we've got to—," and I said, "No, we're going to do it my way. I'm the one that's getting married, and she wants it low key too. The important thing is we love each other, and we don't have to do all the whole thing and the big celebration and that. Not only that, we don't have the money to do it, and if we did it, we would rather put it down as a down payment for a house rather than doing that."

So I said, "Well, for your honeymoon, honey, a couple of weeks, going on a camping trip with the kids and you're coming along." So she acted as a housewife for the kids. We went up to the Sierras with another couple of camp counselors that came with us. There was a guy from 'SC who was a gymnast, who was also a houseparent, and he came along with us.

ESPINO

What year was that that you got married?

RAZO

1965. And we still argue as to what date it was. [laughter] Occasionally we have to take out the marriage certificate, the 18th or 19th or what?

ESPINO

That's funny.

RAZO

We don't celebrate it.

ESPINO

You don't?

RAZO

If we remember it, we say, "Hey, let's go out to dinner." Then we say, "What's the occasion?" "I think it's our wedding ceremony." We're not into that formal. We do Mother's Day and birthdays and so forth, and Christmas, of course, with the family, and Thanksgiving, and we all spend it down here. But the personal deals, and now that I'm economically secure, and have been for quite a number of years, "Let me get you a better wedding ring than that."

"No, no way. I got what I need."

Big earrings, diamond earrings? "No way. I'm satisfied." She's very, very low key, not into ostentatious display of wealth and so forth.

ESPINO

So you found somebody who was pretty much your soul mate, essentially.

RAZO

Yes, yes.

ESPINO

That's beautiful.

RAZO

Yes, yes.

ESPINO

Do you want to stop here, or do you want me to ask you one more thing so you can go back—

RAZO

Yes, why don't you ask me one more.

ESPINO

We can go back, because now we go back to—because I don't feel like we've quite finished with the walkouts. There's so much more that happens after that week in March.

RAZO

Well, after the walkouts, okay, let me continue with the walkouts. After Lincoln walked out,

and I can't remember if it was the same day or the other day or the next day—I think it might have been the same day that we walked out Lincoln in the morning, and then we went after Roosevelt. I always traveled with two or three people. I didn't travel with a whole caravan and crowd. It was sort of the sneaky, in the shadows type of way of doing and sitting by the sides and trying to analyze what was happening at the schools. All I remember is that when we got to Roosevelt, many of the kids were already out and on the street. I remember some buses coming down the street, and maybe UMAS from UCLA had already been there.

I remember a number of kids walking, and then some black kids getting bricks and rocks, and as the buses came out down the street, breaking the windows, throwing the bricks. I ran over to them and said, "What the hell are you guys doing? We don't do that to our people here." We stopped them from that kind of violence.

ESPINO

Were they neighborhood kids or students from the school or what?

RAZO

No, no, they were students from the school. Roosevelt was mixed. Yes, Roosevelt had a certain segment of the population that were black, and I guess they had seen the pictures from the Watts Riots, and that was their expectations, mess up, taxicabs, that kind of stuff. And we said, "That bullshit just doesn't cut it, not here." Then we walked them to the park. I don't even remember if I was carrying a camera at Roosevelt. That's really all I remember from Roosevelt High School.

Now, the next day then we met and said, "Belmont has to go and Wilson has to go." But my understanding is that Wilson actually was the first one that walked out even before Garfield.

ESPINO

Yes.

RAZO

But they did it over some protest or another that they didn't like, and they didn't get their way, so they said, "Hell with it. We're walking out." But that really didn't trigger off anything.

ESPINO

No?

RAZO

Very few of us knew that Wilson had walked out. It was later on that we learned about it, and we did not have anyone at Wilson taking photographs or anything. Now, many of the people may claim they have shots from many of the schools, but these schools kept walking

out every day. So it may not be because it was the initial walkout. It may photos from subsequent days.

ESPINO

Right. And even in the film, Moctesuma's film, the footage that you see, you don't know from what day it's from, what school it's from.

RAZO

Or what year.

ESPINO

Or was it even 1970? Yes.

RAZO

That's right, and sometimes '71.

ESPINO

Even '71?

RAZO

Yes, yes, because many of the schools say, "Well, let's celebrate the anniversary of the walkout." Boom. So the kids walk out. You don't even know if they were walking out because of the immigration marches, which they were walking out too.

ESPINO

In the eighties or nineties.

RAZO

Yes. All sorts of footage was shot, but you can't date it. As far as I know, no one was at Wilson and no one other than the Brown Berets were at Garfield, and no one took any pictures that I see from Garfield High School, at least from the initial walkout, including the Berets.

ESPINO

Those pictures of Carlos Montes, those are from Roosevelt?

RAZO

They may have happened, yes, there.

Then the next day, I, myself, and Raul, Lupe Saavedra, who was a writer and poet and also

acted in the teatros with us, drove over, I believe in my car. I used to have a little square-back Volkswagen and drove over there. We were in front of the school, and Raul had been working with a little gal, [Spanish name]—she was not Latina—over at Belmont. Her parents were on the radical side.

ESPINO

Oh, yes, he told me about that.

RAZO

Later on, she wound up being a stripper and appeared—

ESPINO

Oh, god.

RAZO

Well, not only a stripper, she appeared in porno films. We get all sorts of strange tales. Cute little thing. She was the one that it had been arranged that when we appeared, she would start, along with other people, shouting “Walkout!” and pull the fire alarm.

Well, as soon as I got out of the car and went out in front with Lupe and Raul, a cop who had been at Lincoln High School came over to me and he says, “You’re under arrest. I recognize you as being at Lincoln High School yesterday.” So there go three of us.

ESPINO

He arrested you there and then.

RAZO

Yes, right then and there. Didn’t have much of a chance. We must have been out there for five minutes.

ESPINO

Oh, my goodness.

RAZO

And took us straight to the Rampart Division headquarters and they brought us in. I’m walking in the door and then I see a friend of mine that I played high school football with, with the little guys. He was a detective. I said, “Leroy, Leroy Orozco, what are you doing here? How’s it going?”

He looks up. He’s interviewing some criminal that’s with him there. [laughter] He looks up, “Hey, Joe.” We didn’t shake hands.

The cop says, “You know this guy, Leroy?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I know him. Old high school friend of mine.”

They sat us down, and they took me into a room, and they said, “Let me see your wallet.”

So I said, “Okay, here.” [interruption]

ESPINO

I’m going to pause it. Okay. Let me just say, okay we’re going to stop it here, and then we’re going to continue it the next time. Okay. Thank you. [End of March 8, 2013 interview]

1.4. Session Four (March 18, 2013)

ESPINO

This is Virginia Espino, and today is March 18, and I’m interviewing Joe Razo at his home in Alhambra, California.

Before we started, you were mentioning how you have some clarifications about what we talked about before and based on some of the photographs that you’ve been looking at that have been circulating on the Internet and that have also come out of discovery of the or the liberation of the La Raza negatives. So can you tell me then or repeat what you were saying before about those pictures?

RAZO

Well, I think initially when we went to Lincoln High School that there were actually several groups rather than just one group going ahead. I know we were in the lead group, and that was Moctesuma Esparza, myself, Richard Vigil. I think Eli was with us or right behind us. Raul Ruiz was with us. There were two or three other people. There were no Brown Berets that I can recall. Ruth had to be with us, because Ruth was with us all the time, and Ruth always carried a camera. Margie Sanchez may have been there. Pat Sanchez may have accompanied her. I can’t recall, but I know the night before we had met and had planned it out, and I don’t recall seeing Pat in many other schools. I do recall seeing him at Lincoln High School and, of course, he was one of the thirteen. Maybe that’s where they got the information for the indictment, from Pat, because I certainly did not see him at Belmont, and although he may have been, I did not see him at Roosevelt either, nor at Wilson. So I suspect that his indictment came out of the Lincoln High School appearance.

ESPINO

So he’s the Patricio Sanchez that was indicted.

RAZO

Right. And we have pictures of him demonstrating at the Board of Education and, I believe, at Lincoln High School too. His wife was very active too. For some reason or another, I keep blocking her name.

ESPINO

Was it Isabel or Josefina?

RAZO

Josefina. Josefina Sanchez. Now, she was more active than he was and very vocal, and we also have her appearing before a panel of women at Cal State L.A.

ESPINO

You have a photograph of her?

RAZO

Yes, yes. No, she was just a very active woman and very vocal, too, assertive.

ESPINO

Maybe I'm going to digress here, but Dolores Delgado Bernal, she's a scholar in education, graduate from UCLA, she wrote a paper about how we had to look at leadership differently and if we do, we'll see all these women emerging as leaders. Because Isabel Sanchez, her name doesn't come up very often in any of the books written about the walkouts. She's not in the film.

RAZO

Who's Isabel?

ESPINO

I mean Josefina. Josefina Sanchez. Excuse me. That's what makes these oral histories fantastic.

RAZO

She was very active and sometimes could be abrasive because she pushed in between heavy Socialist Marxist point of view, more of a Socialist point of view, and later on I'll highlight about some of the conflicts where they were really trying to form their own group.

ESPINO

Who was?

RAZO

Josefina, Pat, and Margie and eventually Cruz Ameda joined them, because Cruz was tied into Margie. Cruz and Margie were a couple later on, and I guess later on he moved in with them and lived with them, and I believe they had a child. That was after Cruz broke up with the Brown Berets.

ESPINO

Right, and they were forming the August 29th Movement, is that his—

RAZO

Well, Cruz was into La Junta.

ESPINO

That was after the—

RAZO

After the initial walkout.

ESPINO

After he left the Brown Berets?

RAZO

Right. He shortly broke up with the Brown Berets right after that.

ESPINO

Right after the walkout.

RAZO

Right, right after the walkout and started his own group. We have pictures of people holding signs and Cruz being in the audience at the Board of Education showing the signs “La Junta is for you.”

ESPINO

Did he approach you about joining La Junta?

RAZO

No, no. He just broke off on his own. I guess there was some conflict internally, and we housed him, we housed him at La Raza. He came over with about six other people, and I don’t think they were members of the Brown Berets.

ESPINO

You mean housed them as far as them sleeping there?

RAZO

As far as their operating out of La Raza, we gave them an upstairs couple of rooms.

ESPINO

So then his ideology, because from what I understand, he was more, like you say, Marxist Socialist, that wasn't—

RAZO

Well, I don't know if Cruz was into that, but I know that Josefina and Pat were into that.

ESPINO

Yes, that's what I've been told in some of my interviews of why there was a split. He wanted the Brown Berets to be more radical.

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

And I hope to interview him to actually clarify some of these points and discuss that with him, but—

RAZO

I never had those discussions with Cruz.

ESPINO

Oh, you never did?

RAZO

No, no.

ESPINO

So they would work pretty much on their own?

RAZO

We housed them, and I knew Cruz. Cruz, when I first met the Berets, was more in the background. The guys that were more upfront were, of course, Carlos Montes is always a

vocal one, what we call El Perico, and David Sanchez was more quiet, but you could see his inner strength. It just came out of his pores, and you could tell that he had the leadership ability. Fred Lopez was more quiet, but to me he was the most stable one, and a lot of the brains. A lot of what he did, sort of the kind of role I was playing in La Raza, he was in the background, but trying to keep a balance on everything. And Ralph Ramirez was quiet, but you could also notice his strength. To me, Fred and Ralph Ramirez were the stable ones in the Brown Berets. David didn't show too much of his cards, but you could tell he was calling the shots.

ESPINO

They both mention—Carlos Montes and actually I think Raul Ruiz also mentioned this, and David Sanchez, that you were often mistaken for a Brown Beret.

RAZO

Well, and again, that was because of the fact that initially even before the Brown Berets started, that I had a Brown Beret hat, which I didn't wear every day. I just wore it whenever I felt like it. Carmelita Ramirez wore one, and Virginia Espinosa—I think that was her last name—also wore one, and she was the caretaker for Father Luce's church, and every once in a while, I think, her son would probably take her cap and wear it.

But, no, I was not a Brown Beret. We only hung around for about a week and a half, and the mistake may have been when I wrote a proposal for the real Great Society with a whole bunch of Puerto Ricans, might have been in Chicago, might have been in Missouri. There was a convention of Far East radicals, and an individual—I forget. He was an Anglo guy who was working with radical groups and trying to get funding along the economic opportunities agency that Kennedy had started and that Johnson eventually picked up, of channeling funds to poverty groups. He knew my background and my education and said, "Look, I'm dealing with a lot of guys that are dropouts and in gangs and stuff like that, and I'd like to utilize your services. You listen to what they're saying and possibly come up with some ideas for a proposal, and then we'll refine that, and then I will take that proposal and present it to Washington, D.C. and my funding sources and see if I can get them funding."

I think it was a Black Hawks and the Real Great Society. There must have been about two or three hundred Puerto Rican gang-affiliated guys. I forgot what city it was. So I said, "Sounds good, as long as you send me a plane ticket, because I have no money, and I'll be glad to come over."

It was about a three-day conference, and I listened to what they were saying. I was wearing my regular beret, but, again, no patch on it, and talked to them and listened to what was detailed and put together a proposal and submitted it and gave it to that guy. I don't even know if they got funded, because at that time the Black Hawks were—I mean, and the real Great Society, we're talking about real heavy thugs and we're talking about people that were in their forties, sort of like [unclear] from the union gang. I mean, these weren't kids. It ran all the way from seniors to peewees to juniors to all the way down to little kids. I don't recall any women there, but, I mean, they were into some heavy, heavy stuff.

I think the perspective of the guy that brought me over was different from their perspective, at least in talking to him. They saw it more as we're trying to rip off some money from the federal government, and so, yes, I can relate to where they were coming. But they were heavies. Compared to what we had here in Los Angeles, we were nowhere close to them. I mean, these were people that had been in organized crime for quite a while.

ESPINO

So it's taking the idea of the gang violence to a whole different level, too, a more organized —

RAZO

And poverty is different. Poverty is different over there compared to what we had over here. When they came over here, they would say, "What the hell are you guys fighting for? I mean, you guys have it made." And that's true. I mean, you talk about tenement housing, just crowded conditions. Poverty to us, but to them we were living in Beverly Hills, so it was just a different function.

ESPINO

Yes, it's relative too.

RAZO

But, no, I never identified with the Brown Berets. I saw more the Brown Berets as a youth group, not necessarily a college-oriented group, but a youth group with young adults that were pushing to find their way and talking tough. But talking tough and doing are two entirely different things. I do think eventually that's the way they went.

ESPINO

Did they come to La Raza to—I don't know if you witnessed them coming, seeking advice from yourself or from—

RAZO

Well, I'm going to focus on that after we get through with the walkouts, because there was a major confrontation.

ESPINO

Okay. In 1970?

RAZO

No. I think it was shortly thereafter. Well, what happened, the walkouts occurred and so on and so forth with all the various schools, and out of that you had different people going in

different directions.

ESPINO

Do you want to back up before you start going there and talk a little bit more about the walkouts, or do you want to start from there?

RAZO

Well, let's see. In terms of the walkouts, they happened at Lincoln. For me, that was the first one, because, as I said before, I tried to walk the kids out. That didn't happen. And spoke to David. The Brown Berets were the ones that made that happen. But according to many other people, that was not the first school that walked out.

ESPINO

Yes.

RAZO

Wilson walked out, and that that triggered off the Brown Berets going off into Garfield and then walking them out. At Wilson, they walked out over a quarrel with the principal for something or another that had really nothing to do with the walkouts, because very few people were working Wilson High School, in terms of the movement. But the kids themselves communicate with one another, so they know what's happening.

ESPINO

Could you reflect, before you go forward, on what the impression of Wilson High School was in relation to the other high schools?

RAZO

Well, Wilson High School, to me, it had the reputation of being a very athletic, gifted school with very assertive and aggressive coaches. We didn't even—at least I didn't even consider it in terms of academics, although it was right in the barrio in El Sereno. And certainly since I lived in El Sereno, I should have been more familiar, but I was more familiar with that they always had good cross-country teams for running and that they had a coach, a football coach, and they were a very good football team, and he always loved to run up the scores against all the other teams. Even in the fourth quarter, they were leading 60-to-nothing, he tried to make it eighty-something-to-nothing, and sort of rub it in your face type of thing. So he was constantly being criticized, not only in the community but by other schools like Lincoln High School and some of the other schools that played them, because it was a "take no prisoners" approach. So he wasn't very well liked.

ESPINO

I graduated from Franklin High School, and I remember our perception was that it was more the middle-class, the upper-middle-class Latinos, Chicanos that went to Wilson. Was that the case there?

RAZO

Also Anglo.

ESPINO

And also Anglo, yes.

RAZO

At that time, yes. Kushia was the coach there, and his son was one of the quarterbacks, and, yes, we looked at it more as a middle-class type of school and really didn't do too much in terms of trying to get the people excited. In fact, El Sereno was more of a middle-class community for a while there, and homes were similar to the homes that we have here before they talked about putting the freeway through, the 710 North.

ESPINO

I see.

RAZO

So, yes, Chicanos hadn't completely taken it over, but there was tremendous migration into that area.

ESPINO

So then how did you respond to the fact that it was Wilson first when you think about their reputation is not—

RAZO

Well, I didn't even know that Wilson had walked out. Later on, someone told me that Wilson had walked out. I thought Garfield was the first one, but apparently Wilson put pressure on Garfield, because the next day after the kids from Wilson walked out, then Garfield walked out. Other than the Brown Berets going over to Garfield and walking them out, we had absolutely no pictures.

ESPINO

No pictures of it?

RAZO

No pictures. If we had known, we would have photographed it. David didn't communicate to anyone, and I can say that I don't blame him, because there were so many cops trying to infiltrate various movements to try and get intelligence on movement activities. So that might have been the reason, might have been that he didn't trust anyone and wanted to do his own thing.

All I know is I heard from Fred Lopez, because Fred later on also left the Brown Berets and came over to La Raza. Fred had always had good relationships with Risco, too. Fred got tired with a lot of shenanigans that were going on with the Berets, and he said, “That’s not for me,” and came over and started working with the newspaper.

But from there on, we went to Belmont, and that’s where Ruth was arrested. We had been arrested probably at about an hour before. Raul Ruiz, myself, Guadalupe Saavedra had gone in my car, and they picked us up because they recognized me from being at Lincoln High School the day before. I don’t know if we can call it an arrest or a detention. To me it was more of a detention because they brought us in and they went through all our paperwork, our wallet, and asked me where my wife worked and that kind of stuff. That’s when they found the card from the US organization, a black liberation group, Ron Karenga, in my wallet, and then they said, “Okay, so you have linkup with the Black Movement,” because I had visited US before, although I had not met with Ron, because I wanted to see what services they could offer. Their services ranged from A to Z.

ESPINO

I want to ask you about that, too, but this was your first arrest ever?

RAZO

No, no, no.

ESPINO

I mean in relation to the movement.

RAZO

To the movement, yes.

ESPINO

Okay. You didn’t tell me about your previous arrests. [laughs]

RAZO

Right, no.

ESPINO

We can talk about them another time if you want to, or not. But, okay, this was your first. Was it your first arrest after being married to—

RAZO

Yes, yes. Again, I don’t call it an arrest. I call it more a detention, because they cut us loose after about two hours.

ESPINO

But did they handcuff you?

RAZO

Oh, definitely, yes, yes. But they can handcuff you and take you to the station and fingerprint you and do all that, but what I recall is I don't recall being fingerprinted and I don't recall being photographed. So it can't—I don't think it was. They may have, but I seriously don't think that happened.

ESPINO

Were you anticipating when you were contemplating the walkouts and helping the students to walk out, that you could be arrested?

RAZO

Oh, yes, yes. We knew we could be arrested, but if I had known that I was going to be arrested, I wouldn't be carrying my wallet except for my driver's license for identification. You quickly learn that the best way to do it is not to carry any paperwork on you except for identification.

ESPINO

Why is that?

RAZO

Because they take everything in your wallet and they go through it, and that's the way they start getting intelligence on you and putting a book, what we call a [Spanish word], a jacket. That's the con word. Chaqueta means they've got a file on me. So, yes.

I went in there with my wallet, and, of course, I had my wife's card that she was a teacher at an elementary school, and I had Ron Karenga's card and I had three or four other pieces of paperwork. The only thing that saved me is that on my driver's license at that time, I had a P.O. box, so they didn't have my home address. They just saw the P.O. box, and they asked me where I lived, and I gave them the La Raza address, which was a church, basement of the church.

ESPINO

What did it feel like? Do you remember those initial feelings when they were putting the handcuffs on you and taking you in the—

RAZO

You know, you go in. I wasn't apprehensive or anything. I was more apprehensive later on when sergeant arrested me for the walkout, but after we were indicted, and I wouldn't provide him with information. That's when he said, "You want me to take you behind the

doors and kick your ass?" Then you become a little more apprehensive. He was a big guy. [laughs] So, yes, there was [unclear].

ESPINO

Did he?

RAZO

No, no. Eleazar was there, too, with me. He says, "Joe, give him the info he wants." So I gave him what he wanted, which was the address, and it wasn't to my house. It was an address to La Raza again, and that's what he wanted.

ESPINO

Wow. In these days, you could find any of that stuff on the Internet. You don't have to ask. You don't have to interrogate. In those days—

RAZO

It's still happening. It's still happening. Yes.

ESPINO

But going back to that initial arrest, you were arrested with other—or, okay, you were taken into custody, I guess.

RAZO

Into custody with Raul and Guadalupe Saavedra—

ESPINO

And no women were taken?

RAZO

—and put in the back of the car. After we were there for about an hour, an hour and a half, then an officer came in, I think he was a sergeant, and he was talking to the other officer. He was saying, "We've got two hardcore women here. They aren't giving us shit. They aren't giving us any information, and they're not carrying any identification." That was Ruth Robinson and Margie Sanchez. So they were smarter than we were, in terms of maybe Ruth had already gone through it or maybe she had received indoctrination through the United Farm Workers because they was always getting arrested. So she knew what procedures to follow, and she must have passed it on to Margie. So they would give them very little information, other than name, serial number, type of thing, when you're a prisoner of war type of thing.

Eventually the word got out to Oscar Acosta, our lawyer, and as far as I know, there was no bail required. We were just cut loose.

ESPINO

You didn't have to call your wife and inform her?

RAZO

No, no, no, no.

ESPINO

How did she respond when you told her?

RAZO

Well, no problem. I mean, she's been just real good, just has a real backbone, just you do what you've got to do, and that's it. The next day, we continue. I mean, we didn't stop. It wasn't like it stifled us or anything or anyone backed off.

ESPINO

Did they try to humiliate you? Did they try to scare you into stopping the activism?

RAZO

No, not at all. Not only that, one of the cops there was a guy that he was a year below me, and he played football with me. So Leroy Orazco, and he was a detective there. He didn't even talk to me or question me or anything. He just sort of—

ESPINO

The East L.A. hello.

RAZO

—made a couple of frowns and those type of thing.

ESPINO

Oh, frowns. [laughs]

RAZO

"What are you doing here?"

But, yes, and from there on, let's see, I think that might have been the last one that we went to other than doing the picketing and going back to the same old schools like Lincoln and Roosevelt and Belmont. But shortly thereafter, Sal Castro was dismissed—or transferred, not dismissed, but by that time the Educational Issues Committee was also involved. That was with Vahac Mardirosian, Armenian descent, who was, I think, born in

Mexico.

There were about four activist churches that were involved. One were the Baptists, which were Vahac Mardirosian and Horacio Quinones, both of them ministers. Then there was Father Luce from the Episcopal Church, with Father Garver and Father Edwards. Then there was La Placita, which was the Catholic church downtown. They had an active priest. Then there was Cleland House over on First Street—no, Brooklyn Avenue, which is now known as Cesar Chavez, and David Lizarraga's father was a minister there. David Lizarraga is head of TELACU, The East Los Angeles Community Union, which had been started by Esteban Torres, who later on became a congressman. Esteban organized TELACU along community union lines. He used union organizing tools and funded by the union to get a community organization going, and they were more into economic development.

I got a call from David Lizarraga, who said, "Joe, if you guys going to walk out the kids again, let me know so that we're forewarned and everything. We like to know what's happening with the community."

And I said, "Sure, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll pick up the telephone. First time I heard from you, never know where you're coming from or what."

ESPINO

You didn't trust him?

RAZO

Too closely aligned to the cops and that part of it. I said, "Yeah, I'll be in touch with you, and don't call me, I'll call you," type of thing. But we cooperated as best as we could with everyone. They held a lot of community meetings with a lot of parents involved, and Patricia Sanchez was very actively involved in the EICC, Educational Issues Coordinating Committee.

ESPINO

Yes. I have a list from 1968. I imagine it's in March. It's of all the different people who were in attendance, I think. Maybe more were in attendance.

RAZO

And Raul attended many of those meetings, yes. I did not. I did not. I knew where Vahac was coming from.

ESPINO

Where was he coming from?

RAZO

He was coming from appeasement, and he was, “We’ll make our demands to the Board of Education and we’ll see where they go with it. And if they don’t go with it, we’ll go over there and we’ll picket and we’ll do this and make our presentations, and I will be your leader,” type of thing.

ESPINO

Apparently his involvement and some of the other ministers like Horacio Quinones didn’t occur after the walkout.

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

They were part of that the early sixties reforming, trying to reform the school and improve it for Mexican Americans.

RAZO

No, I saw them at undercutting the movement. Again, I was interested in keeping the issue going, not stifling the issue, because it was a good issue to organize around. The tactics always have been by the so-called institution establishment to undercut you and to appease you by giving you one quarter of the pie, and you settle for it, or making you a leader and you get recognition, and in return, you call off the dogs. Father Luce saw through that, too, and we had some discussions.

ESPINO

Can you tell me about those discussions?

RAZO

Basically what he’s saying is he’s trying to undercut the movement, and not only that, he’s trying to be the head of the educational—the whole issue.

ESPINO

Someone told me that he was elected the leader or the chair of that.

RAZO

It could be, but it was pretty much stacked from the very beginning, and so you see many of the people that were going to flocked to that, including Sal, and you can’t say that Sal was at the same level that we were at. We were at a different level than Sal.

ESPINO

What does that mean?

RAZO

In terms of we were more into using the walkouts and the educational issue as a springboard to create other issues. Sal was interested only in the educational aspect of it, and the same thing with Vahac. Vahac was interested in being the recognized leader, along with Sal, of the educational issue and being the spokesman for the community.

ESPINO

So in your mind, education was one of many issues that needed to be addressed.

RAZO

Absolutely.

ESPINO

Did you think—because who was it? Someone that I interviewed, I asked them about the women's issues like reproductive control and things like that or the health clinic, and they said that, "Well, the health clinic was just something for the community. What we really wanted was this other thing." Are you saying that about education, that it was just a minor issue and there were other bigger issues more important?

RAZO

No, no. I'm saying that there were multiple issues and that we needed to address all of them. If we strictly addressed education and not deal with police brutality and the drafting of Chicanos and getting killed over in Vietnam solely because of the fact that they could not get into college or even thought of going into college because the draft is on and the people that were going to college were not being drafted. So everyone else was being drafted. It was strictly the lower class, the people in poverty, the people who didn't think about being engineers, lawyers, doctors, and so forth, I saw it that we were being used as cannon fodder. That's why I was sending those type of Christmas cards with the My Lai little girl burning with napalm back when I was in junior college. There were many, many issues, and education was a very, very important issue and certainly a foundational issue, but it was just one of many.

ESPINO

Do you think that everyone that you were working with within La Raza shared that same point of view, like you mentioned Father Luce had that perspective and—

RAZO

No, I think probably that very few people had that perspective. I think at least Eleazar Risco, certainly. I mean, Eli had come from some organizing background, and he was looked upon by many people as being someone that could talk theory. I think Juan Gomez would have looked upon that. Maybe the David Sanchezes would have thought of that, or the Fred Lopezes, but you didn't see Brown Berets. You probably don't find any Brown Beret names in attendance at the Educational Issues Committee list.

ESPINO

Actually, David Sanchez is. David, Carlos, and Ralph were at that first meeting. Whether or not they continued on is—you know.

RAZO

What the goal was of the educational issues was to make presentations to the Board of Education and then to get some dialogue going and then that the board would make some concessions. “Okay, let’s get more Latino teachers. Let’s start a program for Chicano educators and move them up the management ladder,” and so forth. We already had a voice within that board, and that was Julian Nava. The feedback that we were getting—and I forget the president’s name of that board—and he was more, “We aren’t giving a damn inch,” type of thing. We kept getting that type of feedback through the back doors.

ESPINO

How closely were you in touch with Julian Nava at that time?

RAZO

I knew him, but I was not that close to Julian. A lot of the feedback came was from Father Luce.

ESPINO

So Father Luce was in touch with Julian Nava?

RAZO

I—

ESPINO

You’re not sure.

RAZO

Father Luce never revealed his sources, so he was a true organizer.

ESPINO

Because he wasn’t in touch with anyone that I’ve interviewed so far. [interruption]

ESPINO

So I’m wondering—

RAZO

But I was in touch with his son, Skip Nava.

ESPINO

Skip Nava is his nephew?

RAZO

Yes, either his nephew.

ESPINO

I think it's his nephew.

RAZO

I think it might be his nephew, but Skip was around. He was a clean-cut kid. Certainly Julian's brother was coming around too. He was not into any heavy stuff, but he was approachable. Also I was in touch with Reverend Antonio Hernandez, and Tony and I were pretty close.

ESPINO

You were?

RAZO

Yes. And Tony knew all these people.

ESPINO

He was married to Julian's sister, I believe.

RAZO

Was he?

ESPINO

Am I wrong?

RAZO

I don't know.

ESPINO

I think he is.

RAZO

All I knew is that Tony had a couple of kids, and one of them was educationally

handicapped and she played the cello. We used to have a lot of discussions about that. Later on, I went to work with Tony because he financed me for many of my La Raza endeavors.

ESPINO

I would love to hear more about him because up to now people have encounters with him, but no one has ever mentioned being close with him.

RAZO

And that was the other activist point of view. The other activist church were the Presbyterians, headed on a national and local level by Reverend George Cole, who was very sympathetic to our goals.

Then Tony Hernandez, who had a church over on Whittier Boulevard, right in White Fence territory, which was a very heavy gang, again similar to the Chicago Black Hawks and The Real Great Society [unclear] all the way on down. They lived right next to the church. Then there were three other reverends, Tony Medina, who headed a church and a community organization called La Casa, which was over near Mission in South San Gabriel. Then there was a Reverend Archuleta, who was also—he had his own church. Then there was Rogelio Granados, another minister. There were four Presbyterian ministers, and each one did their own thing, but they weren't involved. Medina came from New Mexico, and later on I used him as sources for fundraising or for getting of a camera or two from them.

With Tony Hernandez, Tony just, like I said, we were close. He knew what I was doing and had no compulsions about it. Later on, too, Tony Medina hired me to help organize in South San Gabriel, and that didn't work out good because his board of directors felt I was too radical, and so that only lasted for a couple of months.

ESPINO

The Reverend Tony Hernandez, his name comes up a lot because of his role. How would you describe his participation or what would you say about his leadership during that period?

RAZO

He was very active. We see him, I think, in some pictures over at Roosevelt High School, and at that time we probably had a casual acquaintance, but he was always very supportive, very supportive in anything that we were doing, and he realized that sometimes you have to knock heads to get people's attention. He was also trying to receive some funds, as I recall, from the Ford Foundation, and he started a community organization called the Mexican American Community Programs Foundation off that church too. But he was the one that introduced me to Tony Medina and Archuleta and Rogelio Granados and to spread out the word that way. Again, we were trying to put out the word in many different communities, and he was the one that initially engaged them to, "Hey, you guys ought to go over and see Risco and Joe over at La Raza and talk to them and see what was happening." So I don't know what their indoctrination was before, whether it was strictly

religious, and he got them involved into what was really happening in the community.

ESPINO

Did they use the church for meetings?

RAZO

No, not—they came over to Tony's church on Whittier, but they didn't use—they would preach, they said, to their own congregation about what was happening and how if Jesus were alive, he'd be blah, blah, blah, and be out on the streets with all of us, and that was the way they were trying to reach their congregation. But they were also more into the middle class or certainly one notch above the people that we were dealing with type of congregation, because they were getting questions from their own congregations about what was happening over here and was it going to spill over there and they don't want any Cholos or gangsters going out in that type of area. So they tried to settle their congregation that we weren't the bad guys, and they were using the pulpit for that. They invited me to a number of conventions that involved Presbyterians where we could talk to them.

ESPINO

Did you ever feel like they were trying to get people to become Presbyterian or—

RAZO

I really don't know if that's where they were pushing. I think they realized that most of the people were Catholic, and they just wanted to play a role. Their role—let's see. I forget which—it must have been somewhere in New Mexico or something that we went to a convention, because I remember coming back and eating at a restaurant with them and getting ready to catch a flight back to Los Angeles.

Risco was more into Father Luce, with the Episcopalian, and so I started looking at him and seeing how he was using the church as a conduit, and so I started branching out to not only with the Episcopalians but Church of the Brethren. You name it and I've tasted their host. I was Jewish one week if I had to be Jewish, and Catholic the next. I saw them an organizations that could be useful to the movement. We all developed all our channels, and with the speaking engagements we were able to bring some money.

ESPINO

So they would pay you to speak to their congregation?

RAZO

Yes, they would take a collection, yes.

ESPINO

Interesting. So there's many different ways that they were able to offer support.

RAZO

Right, right.

ESPINO

That brings me to your involvement with Católicos Por La Raza because my understanding is that—

RAZO

Well, before that, we have to finish up with educational issues.

ESPINO

Okay.

RAZO

What happened with educational issues—and I see the education issue is divided into about four parts. One was the initial walkouts. Second was the formation of the Educational Issues Committee, headed by Vahac Mardirosian, and Sal Castro playing a big role in it, and Sal Castro was their big hero. Then third, the transfer of Sal Castro, which became a big issue. And not only Sal, there were a couple of other teachers that were also transferred, and I don't think it was from Lincoln High School. I think it was from some teachers were transferred from Roosevelt. And then ultimately the sit-ins at the Board of Education, and the arrests that followed.

I hit upon the Educational Issues Committee first. Vahac more or less had a pretty good stranglehold on the Educational Issues Committee. Some of us that were into the organizing and the theoretical aspects of it saw that as a whitewash, that after we attended a couple of meetings at the Board of Ed. and some of us, like me, I did not push to speak before the board. My role was to look, listen, and learn.

What I saw was that they were giving us a lot of talk but no action, and Sal had not been reinstated. So one meeting—and we must have had three or four or more meetings before the Board of Ed in which Vahac could get up there and do his fiery speech and, blah, blah, blah, and "We are the community, and we need to do this." Then they would shine him off, and then nothing would happen.

Then Julian Nava would come down and talk and, again, "We have to do this, we have to do that, it's a slow process," and so forth. My approach has always been, whether it's psychology or organizing, people do not change unless they are under tension. You don't change personalities. Change does not occur unless it's either a very hostile environment, which creates change because people are going to have to deal with tension, and that means attacking them personally or attacking the institutional character.

I saw Vahac going more for the appeasement approach, “Okay, look, what we need to do is start us as an advisory committee. We’re not taking over your jobs, but we’ll advise you as to what changes needs to be made. And, of course, you have to hear us and make some of those changes because we just can’t keep appearing before the Board of Ed without any changes being made.”

And I think Father Luce certainly saw through that, because his deal was he’s setting himself up as the voice of the community and trying to deal from that basis. So one day he hired a band of mariachis, and the issue before the Board of Education was reinstatement of Sal. Unbeknownst to most of us, including me—he may have told Risco, but he certainly didn’t tell me—the mariachis appear and start playing songs as we’re going down to address the board, all the way from the street outside, marching in there, and they’re playing all sorts of songs.

Sal was reinstated, as I recall, back for a short while, and then later he was bounced again. But before he was reinstated, they refused to reinstate Sal. All of a sudden—and Father Luce was there in the audience, and all the group decided, “We’ll get all our own Chicano Board of Ed.” They took it upon themselves to, “Okay, who do we want to elect as leaders?”

All the vocal ones got up there and “I’ll run, I’ll run,” and everyone, yes, vote. I think Raul got on there as something or another. I don’t know if Sal did. I know he was sitting on—and we have pictures of many of those guys, maybe Louie Carillo from UCLA and a whole bunch of others that I don’t recognize. They took it over and they said, “Okay, this is our agenda,” and they went through all their machinations of what they were going to do.

The reality was that the agenda wasn’t going to happen, but it was a good outlet in taking it over. Julian came back and all the board members had already vacated their chairs when we took it over, and Julian said, “Hey, they’re calling the cops, and the paddy wagons are going to come and they’re going to haul you guys off.”

So Vahac said, “Oh, man, we don’t want that to happen. We’d better leave.”

Father Luce said, “Hey, what are you talking about, leave?” He talked to some of us, and, of course, we sat down. He said, “Yeah, more publicity. That means the L.A. Times and the Daily News, all the TV stations are going to have to carry it,” and that’s what you always catered to. You cater from an organizing point of view to the publicity. If you get the publicity, you get the voice out to the people, and not only that, you get the legislators on because the legislators all want free publicity, and so they will take up the issue of what is happening, especially legislators in our community.

We took a vote and said, “No, we’re not leaving.” I think sixty-five of us, thirty-seven, I forget the number, and we have the pictures of some of the people being arrested, and we were all arrested and charged with trespassing. From what I understand, Father Luce heard about it from the church later on.

ESPINO

He got in trouble?

RAZO

Yes. And Lydia Lopez said she read many of the letters that came down from the bishop and, “We’re all for you, but you are not to get arrested.” So he got his hands slapped.

For the rest of us, I don’t know who bailed us out, but someone bailed us out, and we were fined, I think, $50 fine for trespassing. I don’t even know what the charges were.

ESPINO

I heard about this arrest from when I interviewed Raul, because it’s not documented very well in any of the books about this period and about the walkouts. There’s so much, I mean, how can you get everything?

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

But this is an important—thirty-five people were arrested, women and men.

RAZO

Well, I see some signs from some of the people in La Raza later on who have on their fingers “13,” “37,” “6,” “8,” or “11,” or something like that. I know “13” refers to thirteen of us for the walkout. The “37” for the sit-ins. The Biltmore 6 or the Biltmore 8, and then the Biltmore got hit again and eleven people were arrested. So that’s what those numbers attest to, and I wrote a little caption on these yellow piece of papers on my notations as to what that refers to.

ESPINO

Each one was significant, but it seems like the Biltmore 6 and the East L.A. 13 get all a lot of the notoriety and the publicity.

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

I’m going to pause it for a second, because I think I have an L.A. Times article.

RAZO

Okay.

ESPINO

I don't know if you're interested in looking at it from that. Let me just— [interruption]

ESPINO

Okay, we're back. We had a little digression, but we were talking about the walkouts, if I remember correctly, and we were talking about the—

RAZO

The educational issues.

ESPINO

—and the arrests of the thirty-five. You said thirty-seven, but I thought it was—

RAZO

We thought it was thirty-five. Sometimes these numbers get mixed up. I thought there were twenty-one of us in Católicos Por La Raza. Some people say twenty. I don't know.

ESPINO

In the thirties, in the mid-thirties.

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

These were people who—would you describe them with a similar ideology or point of view, the people who decided to stay at the board?

RAZO

I think it's very similar to the L.A. Times article—I don't know if you saw it this weekend—on the woman who wrote a story in the second page about wanting to call her people "Negro" again, and so she talked to a number of people. It's the same conversation that I've had with you about being called Latino, Hispanic, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Mexican American, and other people prefer the term "American of Mexican descent." We have all sorts of shades from a political basis, and they have the same problem to where some people say, "Well, I'm a Chicano," and I've always said that's a mental stage rather than a physical stage. When we talk to people, I run with a various group because I'm a runner, and they say, "Joe, we haven't seen you in a while. We need you to be on our team and to run with us," and so forth.

And I keep saying, “I’m not in competition shape right now.”

“Well, what have you been doing with your time?”

When I tell them I’ve been dealing with a Chicano photograph collection. Most of the people there would prefer to call themselves Mexican Americans or Americans of Mexican descent, and I think after we’re through with a lot of this, we’re going to find out that even though we wanted to be pigeonholed and called Chicanos, a liberated people, that we are probably in the minority of our people right now that want to call themselves Chicanos. People remember the term, but most of them—and unbeknown or known to us—maybe we have defeated the very same purpose that we started out with, because we are creating a middle class of people who are getting education, and it’s very similar to the Black Movement in that you say, “What are the gains of the Black Movement?”

The gains are that there is still a hell of a lot of poverty, still a lot of problems in the community, but they created a middle class that has been able to move on. Well, within that black middle class, one in seven persons is intermarrying with other races, and I, frankly, think that’s higher with us. I know we haven’t covered other topics, jumping on this one, but I think it’s higher with us, that as our people are getting more education, they are other assimilating more—I think visually from what I see, that they are intermarrying more, that we have more facility, more access to every other race including the white race.

So for people like me that call themselves Chicano, then there’s no problem because we know what our identity is, and we can continue to call ourselves Chicano. For others that want to call themselves Mexican American, maybe they’ve assimilated by intermarrying, and so what happens to their children? Are their children going to be known as Chicanos or Mexican Americans, or are they going to be known as some American of Mexican descent? And what of our women who don’t retain their same last name, who take the man’s last name, and they intermarry, let’s say, into an Anglo? Are they going to be known as Smith, as Robinson, or whatever that last name is? How are we going to count them in the census? What is their culture going to be? So maybe we’re shooting ourselves in the foot through the movement by pushing that and creating a larger middle class, and certainly our middle class is going to have more of an impact than the black community, and that’s strictly because we have a larger population in sheer numbers.

So what we will wind up being in the long run, who knows? I mean, eventually we know we’re all human beings, and we emigrated out of Africa. But in terms of the political aspects that we’ve been pushing, that remains to be seen.

ESPINO

When the literature on the Chicano Movement started to emerge in the seventies, people who were in it, who were of the movement, were writing about the movement. An impression of this homogeneity emerged, and I asked you about the ideology of the Board of Education 35 or 37 because there was not homogeneity. There were all these different—

so do you think those people shared some similar objectives or political beliefs to put themselves at risk like that by getting arrested?

RAZO

Oh, I think so, especially the people that got arrested. But for the small faction of people that got arrested, more people—and they were in the substantial majority who left, who chose not to get arrested. So if we look at it and try and focus on it and analyze it—and this is where this data is of interest to social scientists, to people who can do the research, because if you see the Board of Education—and I don't know what it seats, but it must be two, three hundred people, and if only thirty-seven of us or thirty-five of us got arrested, it goes to show you how many people chose not to get arrested. The Vahac Mardirosians and the rest of the people who took off, it could be because of ideology or it could be because of the fact that they were not Chicanos. They were Americans of Mexican descent.

I had a number of friends that I've identified as being in the audience through photos, who had their Ph.D.'s or who said, "If I get arrested, it's going to affect my career." So it could be many reasons, but I think this is where social scientists would do this kind of research would come into being.

If the violence during the movement that was occurring, that violence within our community turned from being inward to going out to the larger community, did we have lesser gang shootings, lesser arrests among our people during that time? I think it did, and that violence was more directed towards the larger community, towards the institutional community.

It would interesting if someone did that kind of research and broke it down by the police statistics as to what the arrests were. Were they were burglary, for gang shootings, as opposed to confrontation against the cops and that kind of—

ESPINO

Social protests.

RAZO

Yes. You could see and analyze those statistics, and from a psychological point of view, make some hypotheses on it, which no hypothesis is going to be in and take off from there.

ESPINO

That's an interesting point about ideology and how much you were worried about your own self-preservation versus the preservation of the larger community as a whole. What about the question of women getting arrested? Did that come up, as far as people saying, "Oh, no women should be allowed to stay. They should have to go home. Or so-and-so has children," that kind of thing?

RAZO

No, no one did. People like Alicia Escalante were one of the first ones to be taken in, and it wasn't like they were handcuffed. I mean, they were led away. I don't remember any of us being handcuffed. They may have put plastic cuffs on us in getting us into the paddy wagon.

The police and the institutions are dumb. They knew that basically what we wanted was confrontation and publicity. It always takes two to make a quarrel. If your spouse doesn't quarrel with you, then you really don't have a debate going on. That's the same tactics that we were using with every institution. You push, you push, you call them all sorts of names. Once they respond, you say, "Hooray. We got something going now. They're responding to our allegations. Now we can organize around their responses and we can protest."

If an institution completely ignores you, then you're really not getting anywhere. So we kept trying to poke them and poke them until they squeaked, and once they squeaked, then we said, "Okay, now we found some weak spots. Now let's take advantage of it and see how we can escalate it to a different level."

ESPINO

So after you were arrested, how did you figure all those things out? Did you meet as a group? How would you test that, that theory that you just described, or how did you?

RAZO

Well, it was by the fact that the publicity that accompanied the confrontation with the newspapers and the right-wing television reporters, such as the Stan Chambers and the George Putnams, called us hoodlums, these Marxists, these this and that, and you can feed off of that and just—and we never relied, too, on the media, because we had our own media. But, of course, we couldn't reach the white audience, and the white community responded by saying, "I mean, these people are fighting for education. What are you guys doing arresting them?"

From the walkouts, the statistics had come out that 50 percent of our kids never graduate. Internally we had more turmoil. We had more turmoil because the Vahacs and the Horacio Quinones said, "Oh, you've set us back ages by doing this and that," and, of course, we would undermine that with our own contentions. So I think a fewer people attended some of those meetings, and eventually Vahac knew that it was futile, and he's never been too kind with me. We greet each other, but he also knows that we undercut him a lot, because he wanted to be the solitary voice, and it didn't happen. Eventually he moved to San Diego.

ESPINO

How did you undercut him?

RAZO

By the fact that we wouldn't agree that he was our leader and to acquiesce to leaving the

Board of Education when he wanted us to leave.

ESPINO

After that, how did you impact what would transpire afterwards as far as education reforms and that kind of thing? Was that also part of your agenda?

RAZO

Oh, it continued. It continued. But there were a heck of a lot of other people involved, and so with some of us, we were looking for, “Okay, yes, we can continue to publish the newspaper.” But by that time we were also moving from the church because of the walkouts and too much heat was coming in to Father Luce, and then moving into Lincoln Heights, and then after our windows were broken, then we moved from there, because he was receiving pressure from the churches.

I really don’t know where a lot of this money was coming from. I don’t think it was coming from the Episcopal Church. I think Father Luce had his own contacts, and so he was funding a lot of Risco’s endeavors through La Raza. Then all of a sudden, we wound up moving to a commercial building on North Broadway, right in the business district. It was owned by an individual that had some massage tables and a downstairs in his basement, and we rented the upstairs.

Then another group who’d been with us, it shouldn’t be another group, it was Bob and another ex-con, and they wanted to start their own organization. There were always people who wanted to be the leaders and be the voice of East L.A. Meanwhile, we took the upstairs and continued to publish from there. We housed one student there, Tom Trimball, who was going to Cal State, Northridge, and eventually wound up at UCLA Law School. We housed him there, and he was our caretaker. He needed a place to sleep, and we needed someone to take care of the place, so he lived there for a while. Risco, he was still with us but was getting ready, I think, to move on.

ESPINO

So this was before the arrests?

RAZO

No. The arrests happened even before the educational issues.

ESPINO

Before the thirty-five, before you arrest?

RAZO

Yes, the thirteen, yes. The indictments happened right after the walkouts, within months.

ESPINO

Yes, in May, I think.

RAZO

Yes, we were arrested, and that's when we went to court. I believe I talked about that, and Oscar Costa. Eventually we were freed through the briefs that were filed by the many professors from various law schools, and, of course, Oscar was busy cross-examining the various judges as to the composition of the grand jury and that kind of stuff. But even Oscar was starting to go his own way.

From North Broadway, we moved to City Terrace area near Lorena St., right off of the freeway, and Risco was still with us, maybe for about two weeks to a month. Then one day, he just didn't show up, and I was informed—I don't know if it was by Father Luce. I think it was Father Luce that came over and told me that Risco had moved on to Fresno. That was a surprise to all of us because he never even had the courtesy to talk to us.

ESPINO

To say goodbye or no farewell party?

RAZO

He and Ruth used to pick up the mail, subscriptions, and all the mail that came in, and magazines and books and he left no instructions, such as you have to pay the monthly mail dues or who takes care of the utilities, who takes care of the rent, who takes care of the phone bills. It was just, boom, night and day. Ruth, I think, stayed with us for a couple more weeks, and then, again, without a word, she also disappeared.

ESPINO

You never thought to find out or ask people?

RAZO

Never. No. If they wanted to talk to us, they should have approached us, and so we were left. It wasn't like Risco was providing all the leadership to us. At that time, I was providing some of it. Raul had his own thing going with Chicano Students Newspaper, although we were still funding it, and people were just coming over. We had various groups. I had already reached out to various churches and was bringing in money for publication, and so we just continued without missing a beat. All of us, or at least some of us, could type, and we knew how to lay out a newspaper. We knew how to put the paper together. We knew because we had taken the paper before to be published with the editor of the Free Press. We were using their press, their printer, and so we just continued.

At that time, new people were appearing, and I had heard that there was going to be a meeting at Reverend Antonio Hernandez's church over on Whittier Boulevard with an individual that was interested in forming a group and going after the Catholic Church. I inquired as to who it was, and they told me, "It's a couple of law students, one guy by the

name of Richard Cruz," and the other guy was Joe Aragon. I knew Aragon because I knew his brother. Manuel Aragon was a deputy chief for Mayor Tom Bradley. He wasn't mayor yet. He was taking on Yorty, and the mayor was Yorty, who was pushing a lot of the George Putnam nonsense about Marxists and Socialists in our community causing unrest and that kind of stuff. So Manuel had asked me to debate Yorty a couple of times, because he had access to television.

So I said, "Sure, I'd love to take on Yorty," did my research and questions and got my statistics and took him on and confronted him with a lot of the issues that were occurring in the area and why the community neglect, that we were going the same way as what he had done with Watts, ignoring it and not pouring any money in it with all the businesses leaving. Manuel had set me up, and I knew that, because Manuel wanted a more confrontational debate, the more radical it is, the better his candidate would look, which is Tom Bradley. Not only that, it would be good to him because he'd get a better job too.

Manuel, I think, was also a lawyer, as I recall, and Joe, his brother, was a second- or third-year law student, along with Richard Cruz. I went to the meeting over at Reverend Antonio's, and it was a very small gathering. There might have been about thirteen, fourteen of us, because Richard really didn't know how to organize. So we listened to what he had to say, and the guy sounded like he was bright, and he certainly knew the language, the Jesus language and the religious language, sounded like a minister preaching up there, and that we have to get the church involved with the poor.

After he and Joe passed out leaflets, we sat down with him, and I had asked Raul to go with me to that meeting, and a couple of the other meetings. I don't know. Ricardo Martinez was there too. And I said, "Hey, come and see us. We think we can spread your word and write a column, and let's see where it goes." Richard Cruz came over, and at that time Ricardo Martinez, who was at LACC, brought over one of the gals that was working with him, too, in their own regular Los Angeles City College newspaper. Her name was Rosa Martinez. We started meeting and just conversing and talking, and Ricardo Cruz had a lot of good contacts. He knew the nuns from Immaculate Heart. The nuns had already touched base with us, because when the walkouts had occurred, they started coming over to City Terrace and Lincoln Heights and seeing what we were involved in. Ricardo touched base with them, and Católicos Por La Raza was born. He brought many of the law students, and there were maybe about fifteen or sixteen that were on scholarship over at Loyola Law School.

Joe Aragon shortly dropped out because we ran a couple of articles on his brother, Manuel, and Manuel had been alleged to have been involved with CIA before, and all we did was reprinted what the Free Press and others had reprinted as an article. We didn't offer anything new, but Joe felt that it would shed some suspicion since that was his brother, and so he proceeded to drop out. Richard became more involved in it. Richard was just very dynamic, very dynamic, had a lot of nervous energy. He could never sit still without his leg shaking, just burning off a lot of energy.

We started publishing a lot of articles about Católicos Por La Raza and putting out the word to our various people and started staging some demonstrations. Richard would also conduct

his own demonstrations with Cardinal McIntyre and Monsignor Hawkes. Of course, they were right-wingers.

We would go to the Virgen de Guadalupe march, and the first words out of the Bishop's mouth would be when they were driven into East L.A. College, which was the culmination of the march. They met there, and all of the [Spanish word], all our people would be there and sitting on the stands. Then they would open the gates to the football stadium, and Cardinal McIntyre would come in his limousine, driven by his chauffeur, and then he would get out of his limousine and the people would say, "Yay, yay, Cardinal!"

And the first words out of his mouth when he got to the microphone were, "Necesitamos mas dinero para las escuelas." So it was never, "What can I do for you?" It was always, "You need to do more for us," and always the same philosophy of turn the other cheek. May not get a damn thing in this world, but just think what you're going to get when you go to heaven, and you will be rewarded, the passive type of bullshit that we've heard all the time in our churches.

We would attack his speech and do a four-page printout of Católicos Por La Raza, and then we would go and we'd scatter it in every church in our community, to the parishioners. Many times we didn't want to hang around, because we didn't want to get beaten up by the parishioners, but we passed it out. Sometimes we just rolled them up and threw them to them and many of the businesses there.

By that time, I was bringing enough money from various endeavors, usually from churches, that I was able to buy some new machinery, and went to all the bankruptcy auctions and bought a truck. We would load the paper in the back of the truck and go around and throwing it in various neighborhoods. But it wasn't like we had money to spend, so we needed to be selective, and the churches were great gathering of crowds.

We also went to the Olympic Boxing Auditorium, but there we were also had to be very careful in trying to sell the newspaper, 10 cents a copy, and scattering because boxing fans, especially Chicanos, they frequent that and they want to fight. So we would make a quick entrance and quick getaway as the people were going in. We were trying to reach as wide of an audience as we could.

ESPINO

When you were planning on the stories, would you look at that objective as trying to reach a wide audience and keep it? Because I'm not sure if it was last interview or the interview before that, you said that the Brown Beret paper, La Causa, was a lot more militant.

RAZO

Well, I'll tell you the truth, I didn't even know they had a paper. We never really communicated. They were doing their own thing and we were doing our own thing. We were mostly communicating with people like us, and that was the college crowd, the

UMASes, the MEChAs, the Rodriquez brothers through Carnalisimo. They had already formed their own group, and they called it Carnalisimo. I don't know where they operated from; I thought from the projects.

But I was busy. To me, it was a twelve-hour day type of thing, opening the office, picking up the mail, paying all the bills. Father Luce was still funding us for the phone bills and for the rent. The rest, I was having to hustle, so I was constantly hustling and making contact. Raul Ruiz, Patricia Bojorn, the Ricardo Martinezes, and the Richard Cruzes, if they appeared, when they appeared, it was after the classes at night. So the place buzzed at night, but during the day it was solitary individual job.

ESPINO

You were working then. I mean, that was your job.

RAZO

I was working but I wasn't getting paid for it. Fortunately I had college friends that had been going with me through the master's program or roommates who I knew that had run with me, and they knew how desperate my struggle was, and they appreciated what I was doing, so they were setting me up with some jobs. Tom Bingham and his wife, Marcela, would call and say, "Joe, our next-door neighbor, he has two houses. He needs them painted."

So I'd say, "What are they, wood houses?" And having learned the trade from my father, I would get some scrapers and paint brushes go over there and paint them. I also had to pay rent for my own house, and so I would spend some days painting them and scraping them and refurbishing them and move on.

Michael Bahe would get me another job. Richard Mock, who was one of my running roommates, would say, "Hey, now that I've got my Ph.D., I'm over at the Department of Commerce. They're looking for a study as to why Spanish is important for firemen." Firemen weren't integrated, just like the police force. "So could you go out and interview four or five fire stations in your community and talk to them about how some of the fires that happen and the people don't speak Spanish and what the outcome was?"

So then I would do a survey or run a poll, correlations and all that kind of stuff, and go out there and do that with my spare time, send it in, and get maybe a thousand, two thousand bucks for that. So you name it, I was doing everything but prostituting myself, whatever way I could get the money in to not only sustain my family but also to sustain the newspaper. So, yes, it was a full-time job, seven days a week. And on the weekends were church services, going over there and speaking about the movement to various Anglo churches and then taking up a collection afterwards so.

ESPINO

Of all the issues that were occurring around that time, why did you choose Católicos Por La

Raza?

RAZO

Because it fell into our laps with Ricardo Cruz, and Ricardo had many of the same qualities that the Rauls and some of the others had, the Sal Castros, very verbal, very vocal, had that charisma in him and that assertiveness of, “I want to be a leader.” Ricardo was willing to do the work, and we were promoting him.

With me, I always feel that with these type of individuals, they are either going to be a success or they’re going to flame out, and I learned very quickly from the Black Movement that if they’re going to flame out, we need martyrs, too, in the movement. The more martyrs the merrier.

By that time, Martin Luther King, from the heavy militants of Black Panthers and some of the others, the Rap Browns and so forth, were calling Martin Luther King an Uncle Tom. In fact, many of them would later say the best thing that ever happened to Martin was that he was assassinated, because then that’s where—organizing is hardcore, and sometimes it’s so hardcore that you take advantage of the situation. So all of a sudden, Martin Luther King became the, “They’ve killed our father.” Well, that wasn’t what they were saying about him several months before. It was Uncle Tom, and now, “How can we use that to keep organizing the Black Movement?” Well, we were, unfortunately, in the same boat. Anything that happened, we thought, ‘How can we take advantage of what happened?’

ESPINO

What would you say your ultimate goal would be then?

RAZO

Again, to raise awareness and to push a nationalistic line.

ESPINO

Can you define that, what it meant to you?

RAZO

Well, nationalistic, to have our own identity as a Chicano or whatever we wanted. To me, again, the terms to me aren’t important, whether it’s black, Brown Power, or Chicano. Those are just slogans. But to have the right to be able to determine and make our own determination what it is that we want to call ourselves and stand by it, without someone trying to superimpose a term on us, such as the census takers. You’re Hispanic today, you’re Latino tomorrow, you’re Mexican American this day, and you’re a Chicano the next day.

We as a community should be able to determine that, and maybe not we as a community, because certainly I am not a cross-representation of our community, and neither is Raul

and neither is Sal Castro and neither is Vahac Mardirosian neither is Cesar Chavez. We are individuals first who are trying to push one line. But the community as a whole can call themselves what they want to, and that's where the confusion arises with us to whether we're Mexican, Mexican American, American of Mexican descent, Chicano. Blacks have the same problem. First they were called Negro. Well, first they were called nigger, and then it went to Negro, and then it to blacks. So I mean, even then it went to African American. I mean, we were called from Spic all the way on, derogatory all the way on up. It's a graduation, a gradient of where we're at, depending how political we have become and how radicalized we have been. To date, the confusion still exists in both communities, and so what are we?

ESPINO

So identity is one thing. What would be some of the other long-term goals or end goals that you had at that time when you were during your activism?

RAZO

Well, for me it was the long-term goal is getting a piece of the pie, and I don't say American pie, because we're all Americans. America is a continent, rather than a nation. We want a piece of the same opportunities that the white people—and I say "white people," not necessarily white. White being inclusive of all the whites, because Appalachia as has many poor whites and as many people on social welfare. In fact, they probably have more as a segment of the population than any other segment in the nation. But yet when we talk about people being on welfare, we never mention that whites are a greater portion of people on welfare. Welfare is always thought of as being those black people and those Chicano people. I think if you look at statistics, it's just the opposite.

But what I wanted, I wanted the same opportunities, whether they be job opportunities, educational opportunities, even to fight in the war. "Don't draft us. We are not cannon fodder for you guys." It's that dichotomy and that two-handed sword type of thing. "Yes, we will use you for sweat labor, but don't ask for the bigger jobs or the better jobs. Yes, we will portray you as we want to in the movie industry or on television, and don't ask us for those jobs of being an anchorperson on the news. You guys have to know what your place is in line."

I would go into my routine of, "Okay, Uncle Charlie, let me dance for you. Throw me your nickels, throw me your dimes, but don't ask us to be the persons that run hose nightclubs."

That's what I saw as our long-term goal. In every endeavor, it didn't matter where, it didn't matter whether it would be a member of the police force or a member of the Board of Education or a member of a college, trustees, or the legislature. At that time, of course, we were filing a lot of lawsuits, too, because of the gerrymandering that was going into the community. So we had our fingers into just about everything that there was before.

ESPINO

That's why I talked about last time the idea of La Raza as a collective, because you just

described having your hands in all the different issues at the time, but you didn't agree that that took a description.

RAZO

Well, by "collective," collective, I thought you met as a collective of organizers doing that.

ESPINO

Yes.

RAZO

And the truth is that to a great extent, we didn't conduct training sessions as to how to organize. People followed us through our leads, and we would exchange with individuals what some of our ideas were, but we didn't sit down and formally conduct training sessions, and that was done.

I can see, going back also, why Risco was on a need-to-know basis, and that was because of the suspicion of infiltration by the police, especially with a number of people like the Rauls and Luiz and so forth taking advantage of every trip that was offered to them to go into Marxist or Communist countries. So with the media focusing on that, I didn't want many of our people turned off, that I was trying to reach.

We were a collective of people that shared the same goals, and even some of the people today that I meet with would say, "Well, Joe, after you left and so forth, I only stayed for about a year or two, and the reason I left is because of the fact that I thought there was a better way of doing it than what you guys were doing of constantly using the confrontation approach and getting arrested and us being bailed out all the time."

And I said, "Maybe we did a good job of communicating that to you," because what the communication was, and maybe some people caught on to it and some didn't is that we were the spear. We were the point of the spear, and our role was different than other organizations. Our role was to pierce, make that gap, and then continue through and do the confrontation and the arrest and the publicity and so forth and get the political process involved. We were not a self-service organization in which we were trying to recruit mama and papa and all the children, ala Corky Gonzalez La Familia organization. We were the Choreados, and our goal was "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead approach." The Esteban Torres and the Tony Hernandez and the Mexican American Opportunities Foundation, which created job employment and training of our people - their role was to come right behind us and say, "Okay, they've gotten the publicity. We are here to submit the proposals. Now that they've got the attention of the federal government, we can get the programs and the money to our people."

I had an awareness that this was what our role was, and I probably did a poor job communicating this to some of our people. With some other people, they knew what the role was, because eleven of us out of the twenty-one that got arrested for Católicos Por La

Raza were affiliated with La Raza.

ESPINO

Right. Then the people who were arrested with the walkouts were affiliated. I don't know about—

RAZO

Well, there were only two of us—but although I guess you can say with Moctesuma he was in and out with us—were affiliated with La Raza. Pat Sanchez had come around, but the majority of the people that were picked up were Brown Berets out of the thirteen.

ESPINO

For the walkouts, yes.

RAZO

Yes. Then that was because, again, they were the initials ones that broke it open at Garfield, although their role was limited after that. But the cops really focused on—and the cops also did a poor job of picking out the ringleaders of both Católicos Por La Raza and the walkouts.

ESPINO

I was talking to Victoria Castro, and I said, "Were you surprised at who was arrested?"

And she said, "Absolutely." She said, "Somebody asked me that, why wasn't I arrested, and I always respond they weren't arresting women at that time, because I feel like I was."

RAZO

Oh, if they wanted to pick up minors, and I don't think they wanted to pick up minors, but certainly Vicki would have been there. Fred Resendez would have been there. Cokey Rodriguez would have been there. Freddy Plank would have been there. Carlos Munoz, Munoz, not Montes, wouldn't be there. Pat Sanchez wouldn't be there. Juan Gomez would have been there. There were a lot of people that should have been picked up that weren't picked up.

ESPINO

Are you saying that had more to do with actually the success of the walkouts than the people that were actually arrested?

RAZO

Or input, yes. Input. They were at the wrong place at the wrong time, and their reputation has been made strictly on getting arrested. Well, it worked out great for all of us, because as the court said, the conspiracy indictments were too broad. They picked up everyone that

they saw that looked Mexican, and they said, “Hey, we’re going to name you, and we’re going to pick you up.” So many of the people they picked up were marginal in terms of their involvement, but it worked out. It worked out great.

ESPINO

For folklore.

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

For mythology and—

RAZO

And for some of them, that is the spotlight of the highlight of their life, and it’s made them, I’m sure. Job opportunities have existed for them as a result of that, so I think that’s great.

ESPINO

Did you ever have a chance to study the case afterwards, after you became a lawyer? Did you ever look at over the trial?

RAZO

No, not really. I read some of it when I was in law school, and, unfortunately, I didn’t keep the paperwork, and I probably need to go and look at it. But I know that a lot of the charges that were dropped were dropped because of the assistance from outside of the community. The organizing opportunities were great for us because of the indictment, but the legal framework, I think a lot of that came out outside, not only—Oscar played a great role, but the Stan Levy, the Neal Herrings and all the legal aid lawyers. Legal Aid existed at that time. It was the outside community that really helped us.

ESPINO

What was it like? I can’t remember now how Carlos Montez described the proceedings, but were you all together during those proceedings, the grand jury proceedings?

RAZO

No, in the grand jury proceedings, you don’t appear before the grand jury. The grand jury just makes an indictment, and then you’re charged, and you don’t even know anything about it. The only one that knew about it was Juan Gomez.

ESPINO

How was that?

RAZO

He was called to testify before the grand jury.

ESPINO

He was the only person called?

RAZO

That I know of from our immediate group.

ESPINO

Maybe principals were also called, that kind of thing, are you saying?

RAZO

Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure principals, teachers, and so forth. In fact, I still harbor a little resentment with Juan because he should have known, and he's bright enough to know that the justice system is a two-faced system. They tell you, "Okay, you are now testifying before the grand jury, and everything you say is confidential and has to stay within this room. You cannot consult with your attorney except outside the door if you want to consult with your attorney. Your attorney isn't even allowed within the grand jury. You can go out and talk to him and then come back in if we ask you a question and so forth."

But the grand jury is really a prosecutorial tool for the district attorney, and that's the way they use it to indict people. Surely not a very fair system. In addition to that, grand jurors aren't composed really of your community, and that's why Oscar Acosta attacked it, because we had no one sitting there.

Of course, cops aren't supposed to perjure themselves, but they can testify before the grand jury, and we don't know what they're saying because the defense doesn't have access to any of that testimony. So it's strictly one-sided. The only way it doesn't become one-sided is if our own people in some way or another—which they're not supposed to—get word out to us. But here you have a scholar, he has a Ph.D., he's testifying before it, no word comes out to us as to what is happening.

ESPINO

What they ask him, what he responds?

RAZO

We're in the dark. Only he knows that eventually we're going to be picked up, and, of course, they found out that he said anything, he'd be in jail, probably lose his license to teach.

But cops can lie without us knowing what is happening, and you have to know that it's so one-sided that you're going to get screwed. Now, with other issues where the grand jury met, word got out to us, because we already had people within that system. So we learned. But it's more than being naïve as to how the system works. If you already know how the system works, then you do everything, and you say, "Hey, the rules are not just here for you guys, and we have to follow them." So, yes, there's—should have known better.

ESPINO

What do you think he should have done?

RAZO

Well, I know what I would have done. The word one way or another would have gone out.

ESPINO

To warn you to flee or to—

RAZO

Well, I mean, at least to prepare for something, you know. He sort of stuck it—and everyone has attacked the grand jury system as a system that needs to be abolished because it's so one-sided. But he had to follow.

ESPINO

Have you ever talked to him about this afterwards?

RAZO

No, no, no, no. There are a couple of incidents that happened in the moment, but that's one of them. The other one is—I've forgotten. It's someone else that after they got arrested, and all of a sudden it was tears of, "Woe is me. Woe is me. And what am I going to do? My family."

You say, "Hey, if you get involved, you don't cry afterwards. You suck it up and you say it's happened, and all of a sudden you don't cry and let me do my confession and give me your ten Our Fathers and three Hail Marys and my sins would be absolved just because you have a chance of going to jail." You don't cry about it. You go to jail.

ESPINO

Are you talking about Carlos Montez when he fled?

RAZO

No, no, no. We'll not even mention that person's name. It wasn't with the thirteen.

ESPINO

It was not with the thirteen.

RAZO

No.

ESPINO

So I'm not getting the chronology a little bit better, because for some reason I thought the proceedings actually happened after the arrest. The proceedings happened and they determined—

RAZO

No, the proceedings happened before. That's how we got the indictment. Risco and I were picked up at La Raza, and we were taken in. Moctesuma Esparza and Cruz Olmeda were picked up at a protest that we couldn't attend over at Hollenbeck Police Station over another issue on police brutality.

A lot of demonstrations were going on at all this time, and we have a picture of—and I've shown it to you before—of Moctesuma Esparza and Cruz Olmeda being handcuffed and taken into a police car, and Moctesuma looking up and talking to Felix Gutierrez and saying, "Call Risco." Well, Risco was already in jail with me.

ESPINO

I didn't see that picture, no.

RAZO

Yes, you've seen it.

ESPINO

You've shown it to me?

RAZO

Yes, and I'll show it to you.

ESPINO

Okay.

RAZO

Then later on, I guess, Sal Castro and some of the others were picked up, but there were initially about four of us that were taken in. When we were picked up at La Raza in Lincoln Heights, not the church but the second location, Ruth was there, and later on Dolores

Huerta was coming in for a meeting, I think, with Risco and needed some support on Safeway on the grape boycott, and she got the news.

Then they called Richard Alatorre, who I think had already been elected to the City Council or was an aide to Karabian, and so they put out the word. No, Richard had not been elected. He and Art Torres were interns with Kennedy, and so they put out the word to them so that the word can get out to Kennedy. Robert Kennedy was running for the presidential nomination and coming to L.A. before he got assassinated, Robert Kennedy. So the politics. And, of course, Dolores called Chavez, and so the politics started moving in, and Father Luce started putting out the word through his own connections, and we were in jail. We knew that people would put out the word.

Then later on a couple of people joined us. I don't know who it was. Then later on we heard that Sal Castro, Mocte, and some of the others had been picked up. Risco and I were together in one cell with other people. Then as the politics were evolving, they started bringing us all together, because they feared something might happen to us with other prisoners being there, and if that happened, it would fall on the LAPD. So they put us more into high-profile—

ESPINO

Special treatment.

RAZO

—type of. Well, special treatment, and it's also called the suicide watch and that kind of stuff.

Then Risco said, "Well, we've got to do something. Let's go on a hunger strike." The idea came from Eli. We went on a hunger strike, and we had been on the hunger strike for a couple of days when Sal came in. We said, "Hey, Sal, you look well fed. What's happening with you?"

And he said, "What? You guys are on a hunger strike? Someone should have told me." [laughs] So we joked around that and got on his case, you know, and whoever else was eating.

The guards quickly caught on that we were on a hunger strike because we were taking nothing but water and we wouldn't go out to the dining room. They kept trying to bring in trays of food to us. I don't know how long that lasted. It might have been two or three days, I forget. Might have been longer than that.

ESPINO

Even still, that's not easy to do.

RAZO

But people were already organizing and marching, and that's when you see pictures of Luis Valdez from Teatro Compesino, and I think that's in volume one, and you see him at La Placita and the churches, and you see Ron Karenga from US, and they were all marching. So, yes. They contacted my wife, yes, and she spoke before a rally.

ESPINO

That was traumatic, being in jail like that?

RAZO

No, no, no, but her feelings were—you know. She wrote a letter. Good turnout from the community. Then the papers, they did some background research on all of us and published an article that said, "You're taking the cream of the crop. So what is it that the police are doing?" We had a lot of support. Of course, we didn't know that because we were inside, but people that were being arrested coming in from other cells were saying, "Hey, there's a lot of people marching in support of you guys."

Then one day they came in and they said, "Hey, time for you guys to leave."

And we said, "What? We're being sprung?" We went downstairs, and all the bigwigs were there.

ESPINO

Oh, wow.

RAZO

The lieutenants and captains from the police, and they said, "You're being released." Then one of the guys started mouthing off to one of the cops. I think it was a Brown Beret, "You pigs," you this and that. Then some of us talked back to the cops.

Then the cops turned around to David and said, "Hey, Dave, keep your troops in line."

And Dave said, "Hey."

And I said, "Hey, you know, we're not all Brown Berets. Brown Berets have their own group. There's a lot of groups involved here."

And Dave said, "I don't control these people." But they thought Dave because of the media and the reputation of the Brown Berets that everyone there was a Brown Beret, so everyone was being mistaken as a Brown Beret.

What had happened was that Kennedy had gotten involved, Robert Kennedy, and I don't know if he marched in front of the station or what, but it came down heavy on the LAPD. Both the greater community, Anglo community, and the black community marched, and a lot of pressure, political pressure was being put on.

ESPINO

Do you remember how much time you spent in jail?

RAZO

I can't even remember, no.

ESPINO

It was weeks or months?

RAZO

No, no. I think it was days. Must have been less than a week. But I know they were getting worried.

ESPINO

Who was getting worried?

RAZO

The cops, because we weren't eating, and so they were afraid something was going to happen to us physically, and the news was picking it up because we communicated through Oscar Acosta.

ESPINO

So he was the only visitor you were able to—

RAZO

There might have been someone else, might have been Neal with him or Herring, but it was definitely Oscar. Oscar loved the showboating, and so, I mean, if he probably had a chance to, he probably said, "They have them on the rack and they're turning the wheel," yes.

ESPINO

What was it like serving time like that with people like Sal Castro? Did they keep you all in the same room? Cruz Olmeda? Fred Lopez?

RAZO

I think they kept us in a large room or next to each other. I really can't remember, but I know there were a number of us in there. Of course, when you're not eating, you're basically sleeping, because after a while the hunger hits you, and then you start getting a little weaker.

ESPINO

Did you lose enough hunger to start hallucinating, or lose enough nutrition?

RAZO

No, no, no. I've done that before with Católicos Por La Raza, but it wasn't because of hunger, although I wasn't eating good; it was from being up for three days without sleep.

ESPINO

Was that during when you were arrested that time or was it something for some other reason?

RAZO

Yes, I wasn't even in jail, when I came home after three days of just being out in the streets and doing stuff with people, and I came home. I had to get some sleep, and I told my wife, "Wake me up in a couple of hours. I have to get some sleep," because I wasn't getting any sleep in the office. Too many people were coming over there with Católicos. That was before we got—well, I had already been picked up but not arrested. Maybe it was an arrest, I don't know, it's happened so many times. But I came home and I tried to get some sleep. I told my wife to wake me up, and then I woke up about six, eight hours later. I asked her why she hadn't woken me up, and she said, "I did." And she seemed very touchy.

And I said, "What's wrong?"

And she said, "You cussed at me when I tried to wake me up. You cussed me out."

And I said, "Oh, no, that wasn't—."

She said, "Yeah, you did. You told me to go screw a lion, and you didn't say it that way."

So I said, "A lion? Why would I say a lion?"

She said, "Joe, I don't know what, but you were out of your mind, you know, and you didn't want anyone to wake you up. You were just out of it." So, yes.

ESPINO

That's incredible, that pressure on—well, the commitment that you had to the movement and how that brought pressure on your family life.

RAZO

But that always brought pressure. I mean, there were a lot of times that I came home and, like I said, I went through the kids' clothing and washing their clothing and so forth, because when my wife was also trying to do everything, and you try and fill in. I would see their underwear or their pants or dresses with tears in them and darned, and I keep saying, "Here I am trying to save the world, and you can't even save your own family." So, yes, and trying to bring in money. There's always a lot of pressure.

ESPINO

Were you struggling economically?

RAZO

Oh, you're always struggling economically, yes. I always remember the words of the guru of that time for consumers, Ralph Nader, and when they asked Ralph why he never married, and he said, "People in our position don't have the time to marry, and we shouldn't drag our families in this. We have to concentrate on this full-time," and it applies to all of us, yes.

After you look at everything that you've gone through and you say, "Well, was it worth it?" you say, "Well, yes, but I would have done it different." When you see so many of my colleagues that were involved with all the time and their families were broken up through divorce and spousal abuses and all that kind of stuff, and you keep saying, wow, maybe it was worth it for me in the long run, but for many people in the movement, it took a heavy toll, heavy toll on them. And the infidelities that went on and on and, you know, certainly it should have been done different.

ESPINO

Wow. Do you think you could know that without having gone through it?

RAZO

I don't know if I mentioned, I thought I had mentioned it to you, that individual that came to me and said he had been married about twenty, twenty-five years—

ESPINO

Oh, yes.

RAZO

Well, yes. People looking for excuse or people—yes. And it didn't happen when I was there, but after I left, some of the people for with La Raza were voted out, were kicked out. They

were kicked out because of the fact that among themselves they started having affairs, and it broke up the family with two or three kids involved in it. So all the other staff got together and said, “You two have to leave,” or, “You four have to leave, because the internal chaos is too much for us to deal with.”

ESPINO

This was after when Raul became the editor.

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

That was in ’70? Okay.

RAZO

Seventy-something.

ESPINO

Yes, okay, ’70-something. I have it.

RAZO

Yes, and the reason I know that is because when the people have come back to deal with the film collection, they have told me. They said, “You know that I was kicked out, and I was kicked out by—and he headed it when [unclear] he was doing the same thing, he had the nerve to superimpose that on me and say, ‘You guys have to leave.’” So they had their own way of dealing with it by calling him names and that kind of stuff.

ESPINO

Do you think that’s an issue for organizations in general, for human nature in general, or do you find that was particular to the Chicano Movement, at least as far as La Raza and the Brown Berets—and what are some of the others? I don’t know if Católicos Por La Raza was also plagued with that?

RAZO

Yes, I think it’s an issue for every group that is involved in sometimes what can be a life-and-death situation. You share experiences that really bind you together and experiences sometimes that you don’t share with your own spouse, that you’re in danger of possibly losing your life or you’re in jail together, and all of a sudden you fully become cognizant of the work [unclear] or family or like the Black Liberation Army that lived together and share many things together, food. And those things just can either bind you very together or break you together, and some of those experiences occurred all the time to where we were running or getting out of cops’ cars and running away from cops or engaging in some [Spanish word] or another, and it binds both the males and females together. So they feel

that closeness, and as a result of that, they take more liberties than they would otherwise. That's one part of it. The other part of it is that some people are just plain horny and predators, and they feed off one another.

ESPINO

Yes, I guess that's my other question, is power, the power relations in those organization.

RAZO

Yes, it's definitely a power relationship, and it's the same relationship that we experience, and the reason why we have now laws regarding hostile environment where a boss is able to tell their employees, "Put up or put out or you're fired." And we have the same kind of relationship that existed within that structure, although no one was paid, but you had a boss, person that's in charge or a semi-leader or leader superimposing their will on someone who's young and naïve and taking advantage of the situation. So, yes, yes. Every organization from the Brown Berets to LUCHA to La Raza to certainly the UMAS on campus and the MEChAs all went through that and sometimes are still going through that.

ESPINO

Yes. I was recently at a talk of some young women who were involved in the Tucson Summer, which was last summer.

RAZO

Right.

ESPINO

They were talking about the sexual harassment, and they mentioned something called—it's a new term—a machiavist. It's somebody who uses—and I looked it up on the Internet and there is actually a definition for it. It's somebody who uses a political line to get dates or that kind of thing.

RAZO

Right. That's what we have with—yes.

ESPINO

They're not really. They don't have the conviction for the issue. It's just a way to meet people and—

RAZO

And sometimes the people use their academic standing for that, their knowledge, and so knowledge can be a very powerful tool.

ESPINO

How did you avoid that?

RAZO

I was too damned tired. I've always had a work ethic, "We are here to work." That's why I admire people who do that. Conchita Thorton, good-looking young woman, educated Brown or whatever private university she went to, when she came in, it was, "Hi, hi, hey, how are you doing?" Boom, boom, "What is there to do?" You put on blinders and you get to work, and she was one of the gals that did that. I admire her for that. I mean, it's like I don't have too many minutes to waste. There are only so many hours on the day, and that's what I've got to do. Plus, I've got a woman, and I think it could be it's just your nature and your personality. Certainly the offer was there because there were a number of people from other groups that came in and let it be known some way or another, and you just say, "Okay, well, thank you for the compliment," and you move on. But there were a lot of people who took advantage of it. We had one guy that was particularly pleased and took it upon himself as a crowning glory, and I wouldn't say he was affiliated with us. He did participate with us in Católicos Por La Raza, but he really didn't hang around much. He was a student at one of the campuses, and during Católicos he would come in and out and make it known that he was proud of the fact that he had gotten a mother and the daughter, too, and that was his manhood prize.

ESPINO

It's interesting because I was just curious how would they separate their commitment to La Causa, to La Raza, to empowerment, and yet exploit and feel like it's okay to—

RAZO

The very same way that this man who took our photographic collection and tries to reconcile the fact that he was a leader in the movement. Isn't that a form of exploitation and so forth? And yet, again, it's a misuse, it's a misuse of your own personal power. You have to wonder what the value system of these people is.

ESPINO

How damaging was it to the movement, those kinds of relationships?

RAZO

For me, again, I'm organizing, and everyone is an asset and I'm looking for what assets you can get from various people. My own value system has to be questioned if I am also going to use an individual for martyrdom and say, "Okay, he's dead now. What good can we get out of it? Okay?" Whether it be a Ruben Salazar or a Gustav, and I don't know Gustav, but we need to make him, we need to recognize him for his effort in death. How can we use him to promote and further the movement? So, yes, so on the value scale, it's like the same, the brownest scale and the machismo scale and so forth. Where do you stop? Where do you say no you can't? No, you don't. It's just a matter of degrees.

ESPINO

But you did mention before that you would have talks with people and tell them [unclear].

RAZO

Yes, keep it out, keep your personal relationship including sexual relationships out of the office.. But with some people, even if they keep it out, it still doesn't matter. Keeping it out still affects the office. When those same people work in the office or when those other people know about what's going on, it still affects the interrelationship within the office, and so keeping it out of the office doesn't really do any good.

Many of the things I didn't see, because they wouldn't do it in front of me, and yet other people said, "Jeez," and they don't tell me until afterwards. "Now, boy, there was a humdinger of people, and I had to interfere because I thought they were going to come to blows between this gal and this gal, our friends."

"Well, you should have mentioned it, because that's having an impact on this collection."

ESPINO

Do you think that at that time it would be okay? Because there was a different sense of privacy then that there is today. Do you think at that time it would have been okay to bring it up to the whole—to out them in front of a whole group?

RAZO

No. I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do it in front of a group, but they would have been confronted.

ESPINO

But, although, because you say that, they're affecting the whole group. Their behavior is not just affecting each other. It's affecting everybody.

RAZO

Yes, it's affecting not only the internal group, but it's affecting other groups because some of these people were initially involved in other groups, and that's how they wound up being in our group, through that relationship. Then it affected that other group.

ESPINO

In a negative way, you're saying, not in a positive way.

RAZO

No, in a negative way.

ESPINO

So that's why I'm asking, do you think that looking back it would have been wise to bring it

up and out in the open and have this open discussion about it, versus keeping it all secret?

RAZO

No, no, I think it would have probably created more damage within the group and possibly have split up the group, although it certainly had an impact within certain individuals within the group that were in the knowhow. But according to the people who have told me now, there were so many of these little things going on, but all in their own little corners. I can tell you this, it never happened in front of me. One thing people have learned about me is I'm very blunt, and when I see something like that, I put a stop to it real quick in no uncertain ways, and it stops. Either they chose their timing or they knew when not to do it in front of me.

ESPINO

They knew you had zero tolerance.

RAZO

What's that?

ESPINO

They knew you had zero tolerance for that kind of thing.

RAZO

Yes, yes, and they knew what the outcome would be if I'm pushed into a corner, and that's "I'll deal with you." They knew that, and so, yes, I could keep it calm. But if it comes to shove or push, then they would get the full blunt. That's why I was also able to operate with many of the other groups. I never had any problems with the Berets. I had heard through the grapevines that some had said that I was impersonating the Brown Berets, and they had never bothered doing that.

LUCHA ex-cons had problems with Raul. They never confronted me on any of that issue, and it's because I took care of one of the LUCHA members, who confronted me with East L.A. Task Force where they were trying to rip off some money and to take it over, and I flipped them, and that was the end of it. The word got out, don't mess.

With the [unclear], I've always gotten along with them. I've also done some stuff. So we've always been able to respect each other's turf and never one problem. But with Raul, god, I just can't tell you how many problems there were. I don't know if it's because of personality or otherwise, but you had a lot of that going on in the movement, and it's just, to me, it's dumb. It's dumb because that's too much energy that's taken away from organizing.

ESPINO

I think that just through these interviews I'm feeling more disunity than unity within the Chicano Movement.

RAZO

Let's see. Within the MEChAs, I never had any problem, and I think that many of the people within the MEChAs and within the organizations knew what individuals they could deal with, and they stayed away from other individuals. But, no, there was no real communication in terms of from the various groups of saying, "We're going to do a demonstration, and let's invite everyone, and let's get a clearinghouse," type of thing, which is what initially what happened with the walkouts, at least with the MEChAs but not with the Berets. You dealt with one individual that you had a relationship with, and you figured that that individual would put out the word to his own group through his own relationships with those people and that those people would show up. So you didn't go out and make a formal presentation. Everything was based on relationships rather than a steering group. I've tried organizing before and, well, after with a steering group type of thing, it doesn't work.

ESPINO

When would that be?

RAZO

That would be with the Congress of Mexican American Unity, and that's beyond the—a lot of the organizing that I've done was not within the Chicano Movement.

ESPINO

After the seventies.

RAZO

The Chicano Movement only covers three or four years.

ESPINO

Wow.

RAZO

The Congress of Mexican American Unity was an umbrella group of fifty-something organizations that was started after I graduated from law school, and it was started by Congressman Ed Roybal.

ESPINO

After you graduated from law school?

RAZO

Right, '72—'72 or '74—'74. Congressman Ed Roybal, we haven't even—

ESPINO

And Bert Corona, no?

RAZO

No. No, we haven't even covered—

ESPINO

Oh, that's MAPA.

RAZO

Yes. We haven't even covered the Chicago Moratorium, but we'll get back to that.

ESPINO

I'm going to have to stop because I am starving. Anyway, do you want to stop now?

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

I know I have that date, though, when the Congress of—

RAZO

Mexican American Unity.

ESPINO

Because I thought they were the ones that helped elect Julian Nava in 1969?

RAZO

Well, it could have been. It could have been, and then it died.

ESPINO

Then it died, okay.

RAZO

Then Congressman Ed Roybal got some funding for it and put out the word, and Irene Tovar—I don't know if you heard the name Irene Tovar.

ESPINO

Yes, I've interviewed her.

RAZO

Okay. She was active in the San Fernando Valley area, and he picked her to be the Director of the Congress of Mexican American Unity in 1974. I had just graduated from law school and was having a difficult time, and all throughout this period people in the movement were having a difficult time finding a job, because, well, people pat you on the back and talk about, “Great, what you’ve done for your services, Joe, thank you for sacrificing,” and so forth, even though there ain’t a position to give you a job, they will not give you a job, because they are afraid of your reputation and they think you are foaming at the mouth, and we’d better give you a rabies shot before we bring you in.

ESPINO

Wow. It’s almost like being blacklisted.

RAZO

Yes, everyone, including among your closest friends who always say again on that scale, “I’m Mexican American, but I really don’t want to hire you, but thank you.”

So Irene, I went in because I understood they had positions for organizers, and so I went in and interviewed, and it was sort of, “We like you, we know what you’ve done, but let me see if I can hold you at bay.” That went on for about a month and a half, and finally I was hired for as one of the organizers.

Our job, there were about four or five of us, was to go around. There were fifty-something members of the Congress of Mexican American Unity, and our job was to teach them how to write proposals, to teach them how to establish conduits to the Board of Supervisors, City Council, how to lobby them, and how to get money out of the state and city and county to fund their organizations, and how to shore up their organizations.

Congressman Ed Roybal was the one that started that. In bringing them in, I found out that basically the ones that were already receiving county funding, they knew that the pie as only so big and that if everyone was trained to submit proposals, that means their share would be less, or maybe someone would have a bigger proposal, a better proposal than they did. So the concept of “Let’s be a cohesive and use all our muscle to elect people and to do this,” forget it. Those people would not share any information. A lot of backstabbing, a lot of this and that, and “Thank you, Joe, we don’t need your services,” and so forth.

The ones that had it didn’t want to lose it. The ones that didn’t have it or had very little of it wanted all the expertise you could give them. Proyecto Por La Raza or something up in the Valley, I constantly dealt with them. Richard—I forget his name—who had a job opportunity program and was receiving a lot of county funds, wouldn’t give us the time of day. Irene was onto her own thing. Eventually, Ed Roybal was very unhappy and he said, “I’m not going to renew it.” So I stayed with them for about nine months to about a year.

ESPINO

Did you have a chance to meet him?

RAZO

Yes, yes, yes, came over and spoke to us a couple of times, and I had spoken to him before when I was a member of the thirteen. We showed up one day, and he was there with Judge Leo Beltran—no, no, Judge Sanchez, and we started talking to him. He asked us about feedback on the walkouts. I started providing him with some feedback, and then Judge Sanchez excused himself because he said, “I want to recuse myself. If I listen to you guys, then I may be called, and I may have to dismiss myself from hearing your cases.” So he moved away, but, yes, we gave him some feedback.

ESPINO

What was his response?

RAZO

Well, “Anything I can do, I’ll do whatever I can to help you guys and to use the power of my office to help you.”

ESPINO

Because I’ve heard mixed reviews about his reaction during that time.

RAZO

Also, I mean, he didn’t, “Let’s set up a meeting, let’s—you know.” No. It’s most of the time I would say that we did not deal with him. In fact, I think that was the only meeting, yes. We dealt more with the local people.

ESPINO

Yes, because he did appear at one of the demonstrations, I think at the Hazard Park demonstrations. Maybe you weren’t able to attend that. No, that was—

RAZO

That was much later too.

ESPINO

No, the Hazard Park, right, it was around the walkouts, everybody met together.

RAZO

Well, it wasn’t really a demonstration. It was more the—I would call it a tutorial, a project, and that’s where UCLA and the rest went in there and they had rap session—

ESPINO

Oh, like a sit-in.

RAZO

—with the kids.

ESPINO

Not a sit-in, teach-in.

RAZO

Teach-in, yes, yes. That's where he may have appeared, but I never hung around too much with those.

ESPINO

I see.

RAZO

My role and the people that I was with was let's walk the kids out, let's get it going, and then let's go hit the other school and lay the groundwork for the other school and move in, which in hind thought wasn't too smart, because we didn't have the resources to have teach-ins at all these various schools at the same time.

ESPINO

Yes, that would have really—yes.

RAZO

Yes. Okay.

ESPINO

I'm going to stop it here and— [End of March 18, 2013 interview]

1.5. Session Five (March 25, 2013)

ESPINO

This is Virginia Espino, and I'm interviewing Joe Razo at his home in Alhambra on March 25, 2013.

I'd like to start with a couple of questions based on a couple of things that you mentioned in previous interviews, and one was you said that you were talking about some problems

within the movement among the activists and in relationships that formed and how that poisoned some of the organizations. You said that it should have been different but it wasn't. I was wondering if you can explain that a little bit further and maybe give me some examples of what would have been better or how could it have been better or more successful, the different organizations.

RAZO

There were a variety of problems. One, there were organizational problems as well as personal problems, and most of the problems that occurred, occurred on an organizational basis when some of the organizations saw each other as a competitor. For example, the Brown Berets and La Junta. Cruz Olmeda was originally part of the original Brown Berets, and when he broke off, he started his own group, La Junta. So they saw each other as competitors for a while, and there's not much you can do about that. Both Cruz and David Sanchez wanted to be leaders.

Without a doubt, David Sanchez was a leader. Some people have it and some don't. Some people have that charisma, some people have the following, some people have the demeanor in which people are attracted to them, and some people are verbal. When David wants to be, he can show a lot of quiet strength, and at the same time, he can also be eloquent. He can be very verbal. Raul is also the same way. Sal Castro is another one that's the same way. Then there are others that may want to be leaders, Bob Elias, Vahac Mardirosian, and they may have a little following but not enough to really attract a lot of people.

Cruz Olmeda, when he broke away from the Brown Berets, was never able to generate a massive following like David was. But because of the fact that they knew each other and that one broke away from the other, I think there were some hard feelings among each other. That's why someone came into La Raza one time when we were housing La Junta and broke all our upstairs windows. So from an organizational basis, the only thing we can try and do is to have those individuals focus on the task rather than on the personalities.

ESPINO

So you're saying that the tension between those groups was based on personality, or was it based on a political objective?

RAZO

Both. It was based on personality, because both of them were after the same type of population, the young male, all the way from high school to the early thirties. At the same time, they had personal issues with one another, because one left the organization, and, obviously, they didn't leave the organization on good terms.

Take another individual from with the Berets, Fred Lopez. Fred left the Brown Berets, but Fred was mature enough to leave in good standing. He just had a difference of opinion and decided that he was going to go over and join La Raza again. I suspect that it was because of differences of the way they operated, in terms of goals. Eventually, Fred also left La Raza

and went to law school. He only stayed with us about a year, a year and a half or more through Católicos Por La Raza.

ESPINO

Were you able to observe the leadership of some of the other— [interruption]

RAZO

With other organizations, let's take, for example, LUCHA, which was the League of United Citizens to Help Addicts, rather than staying within their goals of trying to help addicts and organize around those issues, they tried to move in and to try take over the East L.A. Task Force.

ESPINO

They were ex—

RAZO

Ex-cons. Ex-cons, all basically with addicts problems, addiction, drug addicts, except for Moe Aguirre. Moe was the leader, a very charismatic tall guy. I think an Emiliano Zapata type of figure, tall, good-looking, square-ish figures, six feet tall somewhere, maybe a little taller, and he carried himself very well and had been in prison for armed robbery. He was different from the LUCHA members, in that they were in there for drug addiction, and he was in there for thuggery, but he had a strong following from within there, and it was always his way or the highway type of thing, and that didn't go over with other organizations. There were threats back and forth between organization people arming themselves and some people getting shot. Some organization dealt with it on street terms.

ESPINO

Things like that happened in organizations that were trying to improve the quality of healthcare in East Los Angeles?

RAZO

Well, again, it wasn't the East L.A. Health Task Force. LUCHA were trying to come in and to take that over.

ESPINO

Why would they? Why would that be an organization, instead of taking over La Raza or—

RAZO

Money, money. The East L.A. Health Task Force was in the process of receiving funding from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and there were going to be paid positions for staffing. There were going to be training programs for nurses and medical professionals. Sometimes that's where people that learn how to organize wind up going into organized crime. Moe was eventually arrested. He married or had a girlfriend, and she

became the treasurer for LUCHA, and they had a grant. Allegedly—because I'm not familiar with first-hand information—one day he decided to make a withdrawal against the will of the treasurer, who was supposedly his wife, brown-haired Anglo gal, good-looking gal, and took her to the bank. She reported to the teller that she was being held against her will with a gun and that the withdrawal was invalid.

The bank security guard was alerted and Moe was arrested. He went back to prison. While in prison in Soledad, he escaped and made it to Mexico. Eventually he was captured and brought him back from Mexico. I don't know what time he served, but I guess from different feedbacks. I know he's deceased now. Most of the rumors I hear is that he was killed in a restroom because some people accused him of being a snitch, which I question, because Moe didn't seem to be that type of guy.

ESPINO

Interesting. Yes, I've heard his name mentioned, but that's the first time I heard the whole scenario of how his demise. But there as another individual involved in the Health Task Force, and that would be Joe Duarte.

RAZO

Joe Duarte was a clean guy. He was a clean-cut man. I have no problems with Joe. He did a good job. No, I was one of the primary organizers of the East L.A. Health Task Force when it first started.

ESPINO

You were?

RAZO

Oh, yes, yes. In fact my buddy, I recruited the director of the East L.A. Health Task Force, Sy Villa. Sy Villa was a social worker, he used to be my roommate—

ESPINO

Yes, you mentioned him.

RAZO

—when I was at East L.A. Health, and he was also a runner, and he was the one who got me the scholarship over at Cal State L.A. for cross-country and track. Sy's over in Santa Barbara now.

ESPINO

Oh, gosh, I don't know if I want to go into that right now, but I guess we're already here. The East L.A. Task Force had made a nice little dent in improving health quality for the—I mean, there was that huge conference at Cal State Los Angles.

RAZO

Yes, they did a good job. Initially, the individual that contacted me before there was an East L.A. Health Task Force was an individual by the name of Jack Long. Jack Long worked for the Health Department for the county, and he said, “Joe, there’s money. There’s money to expand.” Well, not even to expand, because there was very little in East L.A. “I can put a proposal together for you guys if you can organize some people.” Joe Duarte was around. He was semi-affiliated with Moe’s group, with LUCHA, but he wasn’t a drug addict. He wasn’t tight with them. He was friends with Moe and with Luis Pingaron. There were a whole bunch of other people, a couple of gals that were nurses, and one of them was Jack Long’s girlfriend. In fact, Jack Long got divorced because of her, Lola—I forget Lola’s last name.

But that’s how they came into my presence, and so we talked and organized, and he knew that I was doing some organizing work for mental health and other areas such as mental retardation. He knew my background in psychology. Eventually Jack got together with a whole bunch of people and started putting the proposals together. When the money came in, of course, everyone lined up to get a piece of the action, including TELACU through Esteban Torres. They also wanted to take it over.

ESPINO

They wanted to take over the East L.A. Health Task Force?

RAZO

Well, that’s what the feedback that came through the grapevine to me. We wanted it to be independent, because they could create a lot of job opportunities off of the East L.A. Health Task Force—

ESPINO

Absolutely.

RAZO

—especially in the medical field. So we had discussions when they came around to some of the community meetings, and many of the groups quickly found out that, no, we wanted this organization to be a neutral organization rather that spearheading movement stuff. We wanted the ELA Health Task Force providing jobs and training for our people. So we tried to neutralize a lot of efforts being made by the LUCHAs, the De la Cruz and the others, to have an independent organization.

ESPINO

Were you involved in the effort to bring a Spanish-speaking floor to the county hospital? It was called Salon Medico Ocho. It was a floor that came out of the East L.A. Task Force efforts with the county, with county officials.

RAZO

Well, they started spinning of a lot of stuff, and the interesting thing about it is because no one who knows each other in the movement trusted each other to achieve a leadership position. No one would, through the board of directors, would say, “Okay, who shall we get on the staff?” I already had a reputation, so definitely there was no way that I was going to get a position in that. Moe was not going to get it, so we looked for neutral people. No one knew Sy Villa, and Sy had been in a couple of picket lines, so I said, “Sy, no one knows you. Let’s go through that. I’d give him a telephone call, and let’s see if we can get you in without people knowing that I’m behind the scenes trying to put some of my chess pieces in action.” Lo and behold, Sy wound up being the Director of the East L.A. Health Task Force, and I left Sy pretty much alone to do his thing.

ESPINO

Do you remember the time period of this? Was it 1970 or after?

RAZO

It might have been around that period.

ESPINO

Because Gloria Areanos also mentions, and David Sanchez mentions, too, that—actually it was David Sanchez. Oh, no, it was both of them, that the East L.A. Health Task Force, the leadership was very much interested in the Brown Beret Free Clinic.

RAZO

Yes, I wouldn’t be surprised.

ESPINO

But you weren’t part of that discussion?

RAZO

No. I was just into putting the structure together, getting them moving, and that’s it. I didn’t see them as spearhead type of organization. They were there to provide services and also to provide job opportunities for people.

ESPINO

How important do you think the healthcare issue was? When you look at your work with education and then, well, you did some activism with the Catholic Church, how important was the health issue to the community?

RAZO

Oh, I think it was very important. There was a lot lacking. The fact that many of us had to go to Dr. Carlo to get medical care from the First Street Medical Center and be treated for free, even before there was a Brown Beret Free Clinic. He treated me, my family, and some

of the people, the Black Panthers and so forth. The need was there, and I'm sure he was providing free medical care to Alicia Escalante and her family and probably many other welfare rights members, because Alicia knew about him.

ESPINO

What was his name?

RAZO

Dr. Carlo.

ESPINO

Do you remember his first name?

RAZO

No, but my mother was working out of his clinic, and there was another lady there, too, another doctor, Dr. Fertig, and both of them were left-leaning. They provided a good service, and that was totally lacking in the community. That's why the idea of the East L.A. Health Task Force came about.

But the individual that really almost singlehandedly put the idea together was Jack Long, and that's why I keep saying the movement was not just for Chicanos. There were a lot of outside influences of good, well-intentioned people who had heart and who came with the idea and said, "Hey, I have access to this. Let's see if we can work it."

ESPINO

My big question when I found out about the East L.A. Health Task Force is why didn't they become more involved in the sterilization abuse cases at the L.A. County Hospital and seemed like they didn't take a front row. I mean, when they were talking about health, why weren't they involved in reproductive issues and questions?

RAZO

Because, again, the biggest problem that I've always had as an organizer is that if you're going to be a service organization, servicing people, and you are dependent on funding, whether it be from the city, county, or the feds, you can't not afford to anger your funding sources and become controversial and take the lead in demonstrations. That's why La Raza was never a service organization. Once you start servicing people, these people are going to continue to come back and say, "Can you help me on welfare? Can you help me on school? Can you help me on police? Can you help me on this or that?" You wind up spending all the time servicing people rather than organizing.

The East L.A. Health Task Force could not afford to anger or to alienate their funding sources, and that's why you also see TELACU operate in the same manner. They had a beautiful organizational model, a union model, but there was no way that they could afford

to be picketing anywhere. You never saw any of the TELACU people picketing. You did see Esteban Torres marching with a number of us at different issues, strictly in support, but you never saw them taking the lead role.

ESPINO

How valuable was their support in organizations like that that would—for example, my understanding is that he would lend his office to some of the mimeographing for, say, the moratorium, or he would buy the bullhorns, that kind of thing. How important—

RAZO

Yes, he could have done that. I remember I used to have dinner every now and then with Esteban, and to me it was just his way of saying, “I want to touch base.” He would say, “Joe, you and the family doing anything? Why don’t you come over and bring the family over and have lunch or dinner with us,” when he lived in Monterey Park, and his wife R.J. and his kids were little. In fact, one time he said, “Joe, could you take this puppy? I got this puppy for my daughter, but I can’t housetrain him.”

And I said, “Thank you, but no thank you. I have enough animals of my own.”

He always was very gracious. He offered me a job. He wanted me to learn the housing field, and he said, “I can get you a job with the federal government. I know your background, learn all you can about housing, and then come back and get the funding sources so we can tap into it.”

I said, “That’s not my role, Esteban. My role is keeping watch on the Choreados and trying to keep peace one way or the other, and I’m not ready for that. I know that all your organizations, whether it be you and the others are really cleaning up after we break down the doors, and that’s how I see my role. So thank you, but no thank you.”

ESPINO

Do you regret not taking that?

RAZO

No, no. It was too early in the ballgame for me to be making that kind of jump, and so I chose not to do it.

ESPINO

Thinking about some of the leaders that you encountered during that period, would you consider them leaders of the movement? Do you think there is one or two leaders of the Chicano Movement of that period?

RAZO

Yes, and, to me, whether it's acknowledged or not, and I keep insisting that the father of the Chicano Movement is Father Luce. All of us that are in the know-how, the David Sanchezes, Riscos, my selves, probably the Raul Ruizes, the Antonio Rodriguez, all the Rodriguez brothers, the Devras, the Conchitas, the Lydia Lopezes, we all acknowledge that Father Luis was pulling a lot of strings and using his influence as a shadowy figure behind the movement.

ESPINO

You mean movement in general movement, Southwest Movement, or movement in Los Angeles?

RAZO

Movement primarily in Los Angeles, although he had a lot of influence, too, in New York, because that's where he came from, from the church.

In terms of national leaders, the only one that was looked upon as a national leader was Cesar. That doesn't mean that we genuflected to him, because we didn't. In fact, when the UFW would ask us to support their movement against Safeway and the grape boycott, we would place demands on them. Our demand was, "You can't badmouth the undocumented worker and think you're going to get our support." So before, they were all for, "Deport them. We don't want them. They're undercutting our wage structure.". And we said, "If you want the urban Chicano people to be following you, back off and step backward."

ESPINO

Would you say that was the position of most L.A. Chicano Movement organizations or La Raza newspaper?

RAZO

No. I think that was the position of many of the people from within there, and it was just a growing movement when the grape strike was going. But many of us would take time off from our other endeavors of organizing and go over and recruit people and picket Safeway for half a day and assist in other ways.

ESPINO

But I mean the sentiment that UFW needed to incorporate the undocumented worker into their—

RAZO

We didn't say "incorporate." We just said, "Don't talk about deporting them and badmouthing them, because basically all you're doing is dividing the movement," because at the same time, for example, the Rodriquezes were very actively involved in immigration issues, and I would say that that was more their specialty, along with Bert Corona, that they cornered the market in terms of immigration demonstration and issues. They were very active on immigration issues. We supported them. We did not lead any of those

marches. We were just collateral support for them. Many of the organizations were spinning off their own emphasis as to what they were organizing around.

ESPINO

I was told that—well, it depends on who you speak with. But some people had the ideology that interest and energy placed into, for example, the undocumented issue or the third-world issue, like what was happening in Mexico or Africa or Cuba, was taking away from the impact you would have locally with backyard issues in East Los Angeles, and that La Raza was one of those places where they had their hands everywhere, meaning they diluted their power by having their hands anywhere. How do you feel about that critique?

RAZO

I would say that that could possibly be true. I, myself, did not go to any country outside the United States. I refused to travel. My focus was on the local issues and national issues and Southwest regional issues for many reasons. One is I didn't want to be labeled a Communist. We have enough problems with many of those countries over there rather than dealing with issues here. We only have limited resources, and so I focused on the local issues and did the research and stuck around with trying to recruit members to the movement.

But anytime that you get a kid—and many of our people were kids in terms of experience. I had already served four years in the armed forces, so I had traveled outside the United States. But when people haven't traveled outside of East L.A. or outside of California and someone offers you a trip to go to Hungary or go to Russia or go to North Korea or go to Cuba and expenses paid, they'll jump at it. With many of our people, I don't think it was a matter of ideology, because many of them didn't know if they were coming or going, but it was a place to get out of the barrio, meet people from outside in the world, and learn new ideas when, in essence, they hadn't even planted their feet in the barrio in terms of ideology. Many of the people, I don't think had ideology. They were youth or young men and women who were just learning about "Who am I? Where am I going?" And so I saw that as more an exploratory phase, rather than "I'm going to be a hardcore Marxist."

Again, my quarrel with that was that we are trying to get a movement. We are trying to get a nationalistic movement and it is going to be labeled as a Red movement because of the influences that people are trying to exert on us. We had our hands full as it was with the Socialists, the Marxists, the Communists, the Maoists. For a while, someone delivered a whole case of little Mao handbooks to La Raza, and people just took them freely. If you don't even have your own ideology set as to what you are as a Chicano, what ideology are you going to adopt from Mao or from Marxism? Find yourself first, and then move from there. I saw a lot of the adventurism as just that, travel for adventure, and then they came back with all sorts of I cut sugar cane in Cuba, cortando cana. Well, okay, so you spent a week in cortando cana, what did you get, other than blisters? Some speeches and so forth, and a good travel and so forth.

ESPINO

Some of that was fed by critique of imperialism. Some of that interest in other countries or

countries that are considered third-world countries a critique of U.S. imperialism and that led eventually to the critique of the Vietnam War. You didn't have that ideology? Or what was your ideology when the Vietnam War started to be—

RAZO

Well, we were getting a lot of that, because every day when I went to pick up the mail at La Raza post office, I had newspapers from Vietnam, from the Vietnamese, from every country, all preaching ideology and all in English that had been translated. I left them in the office for people to look at, to see that it was a universal fight rather than just a local fight, but that our fight should have been a local fight.

My ideology was, as I've said before, I wasn't interested in being a Marxist, a Socialist, and so forth. I knew that we would have to deal with being in the United States, and my goal was we are going to get a piece of the pie on our own terms, not your terms, not Russia's terms, not Maoist terms, nor Socialist terms. We aren't going to overthrow the United States, but we are going to get a piece of it.

ESPINO

Did you have any heroes from U.S. history like, I don't know, Abraham Lincoln is the first person that comes to my mind, but individuals like that?

RAZO

In fact, I have his book of his long debates with the Douglas debates and read it. Those were some of the book clubs that I indicated to you that I had joined, and they would send me Book of the Month or Book of the Week, and then you selected whatever books you were interested in reading. So I started getting many of those books, eloquent people, great arguments, but did I have any heroes? No. My mentors were my heroes, my professors in schools, and I wasn't into Viva Zapata. I was into the Catholic ideologies of Saint Agustin. I had maybe about twenty of his books of little short chapters that I finally gave it away to someone who wanted to be a deacon. I was reading anything and everything I could get my hands on. But, no, I was not going to be one of those—what do they call them—lemmings or something, that jump off the cliff when they follow each other. I would be influenced by books, but not any one individual.

ESPINO

When did you become aware that the antiwar sentiment was growing and there was going to be some marches?

RAZO

I became aware of that even before the movement came around, and that was in East L.A. College, and that was through my roommate Sy Villa. As I mentioned to you, Sy Villa was taking a class in industrial arts and had access to a printing press. I might have been a freshman or maybe a sophomore at East L.A. College, and that's when Sy and I started having conversations about what was happening in the Vietnam War and the napalm burning of My Lai, that little girl that got napalmed and ran down the road just on fire, or

her back is all scarred, and crying. That's when I started doing research on the Vietnam War.

But my quarrel on the Vietnam War was not the same quarrel that other people had. As I've indicated before, being an advocate of Chicano Power can mean anything and everything on a scale of 1 to 100. Many people were against the Vietnam War because they felt the war was unjust. Many people were against the Vietnam War because they were being drafted. Other people were against the Vietnam War because Chicanos were being drafted and being casualties in far greater proportion than the greater population. Other people were against the Vietnam War because Chicanos were being drafted and could not get deferment because the only people that were getting deferments were the people who are in college, and they could use that, and since we had very few people in college, they were being drafted and being killed. I was one of those that felt that we should not have been drafted out of proportion, that if they were giving rich people deferments, then we should get deferments as poor people too, that they shouldn't have the criteria strictly, that if you can afford college, you should get a deferment. So it wasn't that I was against the Vietnam War per se.

Later on, yes, I was against the Vietnam War because we were doing many, many other things in Laos, Cambodia, and so forth, but initially my stance was that you're selecting strictly the poor classes. Again, I focusing on the class issue. You're selecting poor people to fight all your wars, just the way you're selecting us to be your sweat labor, and that wouldn't fly with me.

Many of us had marched in the moratoriums. You have a whole realm of people with different stances as to why they were marching. They weren't marching strictly because of the Vietnam War, as the typical Anglo would look at it, "I'm antiwar." Some people were antiwar, some people because they had relatives, some just from A to Z. The reasons varied.

ESPINO

Were you involved in any of the antiwar protests before the Chicano Moratoriums or the Chicano antiwar protests?

RAZO

Well, except for sending out leaflets and Christmas cards with Sy Villa, no, no. No, the anti-Vietnam War protests did not take place in East L.A. until Rosalio came around. He did not find groups of Chicanos as a whole going out and marching with the white radical groups on antiwar. Our primary focus was on education, getting jobs, the welfare rights. Again, it's going back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs: food, shelter, and clothing. You have to organize around the issues that are affecting our people and deal with those basic needs before you start moving up the ladder into other needs. You cannot organize around environmental issues such as climate control if people do not have education nor jobs. The basic needs have to be addressed first.

ESPINO

When was your first march?

RAZO

Well, I think had been marching before when I was working on my master's program, but it was more on discrimination and it was blacks when the light bulb came on for myself.

ESPINO

What about your antiwar march, your first antiwar march?

RAZO

I think the first antiwar march was probably with the Chicano Moratorium.

ESPINO

The August 29th?

RAZO

Before. There were some preliminary ones.

ESPINO

There was the one in the rain.

RAZO

I think so.

ESPINO

Were you at that one?

RAZO

I can't remember, but it was not a large group. No, but it was not a large group. No, there were small groups and there were gatherings and meetings, but it took some doing for them to be able to lead up to the Chicano Moratorium.

ESPINO

What role did La Raza newspaper play?

RAZO

A lot of publicity. If you look at both the antiwar march, and if you look at Católicos Por La Raza, the major movers in those two directions was really not La Raza. We played a supporting role, and we took a lot of pictures and we gave a lot of publicity to them, but it

was not us that took the lead. Rosalio was the sparkplug behind the Chicano Moratorium, and the sparkplug before that had led Católicos Por La Raza was Ricardo Cruz. We were the voice, and they used us as their voice through the publicity, but they were the advocates.

ESPINO

Would you say there was one sparkplug for the walkouts?

RAZO

No, I think there were multiple sparkplugs. We all played a role. I think we played a greater role that most groups did in laying the foundation. I think Sal Castro certainly played a role with the students, and he was a figurehead that we used him to promote as heading the walkouts, not necessarily that he headed it. The Brown Berets, I wouldn't say were actively involved in promoting the walkouts, but they were the ones that sparked the first walkout through—other than Wilson—through their presence at Garfield. But they weren't the ones that were beating the drums. We were the ones that were beating the drums, so everyone played a role, and we played a greater role probably in the walkouts than most groups, except for UCLA. UCLA was very active, but they were coordinating a lot of their stuff with us in a supportive basis.

Of course, eleven out of the twenty-one that got arrested were Católicos Por La Raza or La Raza staff. So we played a major role, and although we identified Ricardo Cruz as being with Católicos Por La Raza, I would consider him as being part of La Raza staff. At that time, he was spending probably, oh, 50 percent or more, the majority of his time at La Raza and using us as a base.

ESPINO

For his organizing of Católicos?

RAZO

For his organizing for Católicos.

ESPINO

Did the Moratorium Committee use La Raza as a base for organizing?

RAZO

No, no. Rosalio did basically his own thing, and even the Brown Berets when they were getting started, a lot of times when David Sanchez and some of the others were out of town, the other Brown Berets would call us. They had troubles with the cop. For example, there was an infiltrator provocateur who was on payroll of the cops who had come from Texas, and we got a call from them that cops were ready to go in there and bust their house over on Whittier Boulevard. It was because the provocateur who had joined the Brown Berets, who was going up on the porch and up on the roof, getting up on the porch and climbing the roof and giving the finger to cops who were about half a block, a block away. They had encouraged him to do the same thing that they did with the Panthers, to

provoke a fight so that they could come in and—

ESPINO

Have an excuse.

RAZO

—bust them and have a shootout and arrest them. So they called me. I answered the phone. I got Raul. We went with a couple of people and cameras over there. Then I saw what this guy was doing and talked to some of the guys and basically said, “Kick his ass. If David were here, David would take care of business.”

ESPINO

David would do it himself?

RAZO

Well, if David was there, yes, they would have taken care of, you know, “Who the hell are you to be leading the group of people I have here?”

ESPINO

Did you witness David act like that ever, or is that just his reputation?

RAZO

He would be firm. He would just tell the people, “Hey, my way or the highway.” So, no, all these people were firm, they might be quiet, but they had the big stick when they needed to. People will not follow a leader if they just sit back and let things get out of hand. David, Ralph, Carlos Montes, they wouldn’t let some guy that just walked in and had been there a couple of weeks all of a sudden try and take over, and none of them were there. They were probably out of town somewhere.

I forgot who called me at that time, but they said, “Hey, come and cover us, and bring the cameras,” and so forth. We went over there and nothing happened. We took pictures of some of the cops from way back, probably couldn’t shoot much because they were a quarter of a block, half a block, sometimes a block away. It was part of the same old boys we knew, the undercover cops that used to follow us around.

Later on, Antonio Rodriguez and the other Rodriguez brothers did some investigation on this guy and found out that he had been working in Texas for the cops over there, and that when the Texas people found out about him, then they shipped him over here. The cops used him to infiltrate the Brown Berets. Antonio Rodriguez, and they held a press conference and they taped him, and he came clean. So, yes, said he was working for the cops and so forth, and they directed him to do this and to do that.

ESPINO

Incredible. That's not Sumaya? Or that would be somebody else because Sumaya's the famous one that testified in the Biltmore 6 case.

RAZO

No, no, no. Sotomayor, I think, or Chumaya.

ESPINO

It wouldn't be Sumaya Francisco?

RAZO

Francisco, yes. Francisco, I thought it was Sotomayor or something like that. No, but he was just one of many, of many cops or informers that infiltrated the Brown Berets

ESPINO

Was there an infiltrator in La Raza magazine?

RAZO

Well, we swept the office twice for taps on the telephone, and it came—

ESPINO

You found them?

RAZO

No, it came back clean. Near the end when I was leaving, or about maybe six months before I was leaving, we started getting a turnover on people. Some people, I felt, were starting to lose interest, and I saw the movement as having peaked after Católicos, after the moratorium. People kept trying to kick a dying horse to get the same kind of issues going again. I felt that there was a waning of interest, and then we started getting people out of the wild blue yonder who no one knew volunteering their services. Some women, some guys, "Anything I can help you? I can clean up? I can keep the subscriptions, alphabetize them and so forth." I thought they just wanted access to the records. So I found roles for them, not necessarily that role, but, yes, I found roles for them.

Like I said, we didn't have anything to hide, and prior to that, the cops had already busted into La Raza when we were first arrested with the walkouts, they came in and they took all our records. That's when we were at Lincoln Heights. When Risco and I were arrested for the walkouts, they came in. They took every piece of paper that we had around, subscribers, and briefcases.

Later on after—see, I was already in law school, maybe about four years later, that I got a call from the LAPD, or a letter, primarily saying that the records were now available to be

picked up. I went to the LAPD and picked up a lot of the paper that they confiscated, and, lo and behold, there was very little that they returned to me. But one of the things that they returned to me was a folder that was listed “How to make bombs,” and I knew that was not ours. So I said, “This isn’t ours, thank you. But you may keep your own paperwork.” I think they were just trying to identify who would pick up this stuff and acknowledge that it was part of that.

Prior to that—no, after that, I also learned that I had a big FBI file. When someone tried to hire me to be a recruiter for Douglas Aircraft Company, and they did a background check on me, a friend of mine who wanted to hire me, and he said, “I can’t reach you with a ten-foot pole. You’ve got a jacket that’s just out of sight.” So for whatever reason, the FBI saw it fit to waste their time, or maybe they had valid reason to, to look into my role.

ESPINO

You never requested your FBI file?

RAZO

I tried after I found out that it took Jane Fonda about eight or nine years to try to get hers, and she hired all sorts of lawyers, and, of course, she had millions and millions of dollars, and it took her one hell of a long time to pick up hers. I made several requests, and we exchanged letters back and forth, and finally I just said, “Hey, big deal, you know.” So I dropped it, didn’t pursue it.

ESPINO

I see.

RAZO

Yes, isn’t worth it.

ESPINO

So just I want to continue with that, but before, I’d like to ask you about your recollections of August 29th and how did you spend your day that day, I’m assuming you attending the moratorium, the August 29th moratorium?

RAZO

Well, actually, yes, but it even goes before that with Católicos Por La Raza, because at Católicos Por La Raza, I don’t think we covered where I got thirteen stitches in my head.

ESPINO

That wasn’t the Christmas Eve arrest?

RAZO

Yes, yes. Again, Richard Cruz was the one that put that together, and the Christmas Eve the fight went on. No, maybe we did cover it, yes, because we came out of that, and from there on then we moved on to the Chicano Moratorium. We published a number of articles on the Chicano Moratorium, and I got in touch with an individual that I had read about, Ivan [phonetic] or Kevan [phonetic]. I read about him, that he was selling planes, buying planes and selling them, and he was a war hero, and selling them in Mexico and other foreign countries, and that he should have gotten the Medal of Honor. So I contacted him and he came over to La Raza, and we took some pictures of him and heard his story of what he did to be a war hero. He claimed that he had marched in a demonstration, antiwar march in Washington, D.C., and had thrown his medal over the White House lawn or something, which I really think was a bunch of bull. But, you know, he wanted a good story on it. So I think we wrote an article on him, but, again, we were trying to be supportive of the Chicano Moratorium and any story that would lead towards anti-Vietnam would give us more publicity.

With the Chicago Moratorium, the LUCHA people initially decided in one of the marches, and it might have been a precursor to the Chicano Moratorium in which we marched, and they decided that they were going to be the bodyguards and keep everyone in line so that there wouldn't be any demonstrations or any riots. That didn't go over too well, because so many of the marchers did not relate to what LUCHA was doing. There was some tensions and conflict. I remember that we marched successfully, but a lot of the people were giving the fingers and shouting obscenities against LUCHA as well as the police. In fact, one time I got out of the march and met with a couple of people who were just walking on the sidewalk, and one of them asked me if I knew one of the members from LUCHA, and I said, "Yeah."

And he says, "Do you want to jump him? Let's go jump him. I was in the joint with him for x number of years, and he's a punk."

And I said, "You want to jump him with all the cops around here?"

He says, "Yeah, man, I mean, you know."

So I said, "Yeah, later. Later for you guys," that type of things.

But that's the kind of people that really were after some of the LUCHA members. Some of the people then were calling them names, because they saw them as an extension of the cops, of trying to keep order among the marchers and policing the marchers rather than police doing it themselves.

What I remember of the Chicano Moratorium is that I did not believe that I initially participated in the parade where all various groups were rallying and marching to Hazard Park. I've been in too many marches, and I was busy doing something at La Raza and indicated to the group that I would meet them at the rallying point, which was Hazard Park. So I got there about an hour before the group arrived and started taking pictures.

What I recall from the march is that I saw the cops chasing a group of people onto Hazard Park and then a whole bunch of Vatos Locos tearing up bleachers and arming themselves with the wood and using the garbage cans, the lids, as shields and moving against the cops. The cops were shooting teargas and marching en masse against the crowd. So I saw fights breaking up all over, people running. It was general chaos.

ESPINO

So when you got there, chaos had already started.

RAZO

No, no. I was there before the chaos started. When I got there, I was listening to the speakers, the Rosalios and the rest, doing their speaking. After a while, it gets a little boring hearing about these pigs, imperialism, and the same old standard type of pitches. I hung out there just taking pictures, and then that's when I turned around and saw the cops starting to move from across the street and moving a crowd of people.

ESPINO

How would you describe the scene before the cops started moving in? Would you say it was, I don't know, a family environment or mostly students or—

RAZO

No, I think it was peaceful. I think it was a combination of everything. I think there were some families, there were some kids, there were a lot of students. There were every type of group from many different places, Bakersfield, Texas, all with their signs and all congregating there.

But the one thing I would say for the group is that they were a peaceful group, and they were a tired group. They had already marched a number of miles. It's probably about three to four miles from some of the rallying places and picket points all the way from Whittier Boulevard, going from Belvedere Park and from Lopez Mara going all the way to Hazard Park. It is not an easy walk, and these people had already marched all the way over there. So many of them had gone to stores, liquor stores and other places, to pick up drinks. So everyone was looking for a place to sit down, listen to all the rap, and "We're the good guys, they're the bad guys" type of thing. I really didn't see anyone getting overly excited at any of the speeches. They had heard enough already and had done enough shouting on the march. They only got excited once the cops started moving onto the scene, and then all hell broke loose.

There were so many things going on at once. There were people running, other people picking up their kids, Vatos Locos, young confrontational types, breaking bottles, anything they could get hold of, picking up rocks, breaking wood, and moving forward. They did not back off. The days of turning the other cheek were long gone, and they took on the cops. And a lot of teargas and people running every which way.

I remember that Raul and I, some of us were banding together and going on and covering different scenes where someone would say, “Hey, there’s a shooting over there,” and people running over there. We were scattered. We banded together, and as soon as we banded together, we would be moved different ways because there were so many things going on, and each one of us taking pictures with our cameras.

The cops moved in and moved the people out of Hazard Park, then we started going down Whittier Boulevard just following the crowd. There wasn’t a large crowd in front of us, but there was a sizeable crowd, and I saw many of the Socialists that were involved in it because the Socialists stood out. They were a lot of broken window storefronts. So I saw them in front of us.

Raul took one side of Whittier Boulevard from Hazard Park, and I took the other side, and we just swung our cameras and did some shooting. He was the only one that I saw there from La Raza. The other people were from Hazard Park. I don’t think Luis was there. I think Luis Garza, his father had just died in New York, and so he went back for the family funeral. I don’t think Manuel Barrera, another one of our good photographers, was there. He was in Texas or Mexico on vacation. Devra Weber was no longer with La Raza, so she was not there. So other than Raul and I, maybe we were the only ones taking pictures there. Or there may have been others. I think Oscar Castillos, I don’t know if Oscar was with us at that time, because Oscar was not—Oscar used to plug into our group every now and then. He wasn’t a—

ESPINO

Regular?

RAZO

Yes, a regular type of staff member. Richard Martinez was there, but he was not a photographer. Conchita might have been there, but she was not a photographer either.

ESPINO

Pat Bojorn?

RAZO

Pat Bojorn would take pictures every now and then, so I don’t think she took pictures. I don’t recall seeing pictures of her at either Católicos Por La Raza or the Chicano Moratorium. So most of the pictures, I think, were probably from Raul and myself, because I know we were taking a lot of pictures. Broken windows, mannequins, a cop in front of jewelry store trying to—we didn’t take pictures, at least I didn’t, and I didn’t see Raul at that time who had his gun out and was trying to keep looters away from the place.

I basically told the cop to get his ass out of there before he became a fatality. There was no

way that he was going to stop that many people, because people just kept coming behind us. Finally, he took off and covering himself. He was an undercover cop. He must have been a detective of some type. Then I walked down on the other side, shooting some pictures of a bridal shop that had broken windows, and I went into the bridal shop and I saw one of the Socialists trying to—well, not trying, he had set a bridal gown on fire. I told him to get the hell out of there, that that was not his community, and he took off. There were a lot of places. He wasn't going to put his matches away, but just go and look and find another place. But I had seen him in many different demonstrations.

ESPINO

That same guy?

RAZO

That same guy, oh, yes, yes. There were about twelve, fifteen of them.

ESPINO

That would come around to—

RAZO

To all the demonstrations and try and use our people as cannon fodder, because later on we beat up one of them at another march.

ESPINO

Why is that?

RAZO

Because he was trying to get our people excited and use them as cannon fodder and push in and provoke the cops so that the cops could retaliate. That's their role. They're all provocateurs, provoke.

ESPINO

Right, but he wasn't an infiltrator provocateur.

RAZO

No, he was a Socialist, and he couldn't do it with his own people. Let him go out to the Westside and do it at an antiwar march. Instead, the more chaos they can create in our community, and first thing they do as soon as the affair gets out of hand, they are the first ones that move and let the other people take it on the lam. "We've accomplished what we wanted to, now let's get out before we get arrested."

ESPINO

How responsible were they guys in the escalation of violence that day?

RAZO

I'm sure they helped. No, they played a role, but initially it was started by the cops, by trying to remove the crowd. They had no reason to chase the crowd from the street, from the liquor store that supposedly was busted in, and move them a block, block and a half away, all the way to the park. It wasn't like there were hundreds of people. They just followed twenty, thirty people and followed them all the way to the park, and there were already a lot of squad cars across the street from the park who were just keeping an eye on us. So they just used that as an excuse to further provoke the crowd and form a scrimmage line and move against the people. But as Raul and I continued, and we would meet up every now and then, we saw other people taking pictures. We saw a lot of cops, undercover cops, photographers also taking pictures, and you could usually see them because some of them had 16-millimeter cameras so they were taking film.

Then as we kept going down, I noticed two or three squad cars that were outside a place called the Silver Dollar, and I told Raul, "Let's do some shooting here." We took a spot, and the cops told us to get the hell out of there because we were taking shots right behind some of the squad cars. So Raul moved across to across the street and I moved to another place, and we continued to take some photos because the cops were going in with shotguns and standing by the door and pushing people back. Those were the pictures that came out of the Silver Dollar where Ruben Salazar had apparently gone in there before and had gotten killed. But that didn't happen when we were there. At least according to the coroner's inquest, that had happened before.

ESPINO

He was already dead inside?

RAZO

He was already dead.

ESPINO

You didn't know that?

RAZO

No, we didn't know that, because the cops kept pushing the people back in there. At least that's what the time sequence appears to be. It may turn out to be difference once Phil's film comes out this fall, but we didn't see anyone firing in there. We saw the teargas rifles being poked from within there, but we didn't see any shooting. We saw them pushing the crowd back into it. They didn't want any of the people to leave there.

ESPINO

So then is it clear who took those pictures?

RAZO

He took some, and I would say that the pictures he took were a lot clearer than mine. I recognized mine, and I took maybe about twenty or thirty photos. He took about twenty, twenty-five photos.

I think that we didn't continue too much further. We took some photos there, and maybe went all the way to Atlantic Boulevard. The Silver Dollar is maybe about five or six blocks from Atlantic. I don't remember how we got back to the office. We could have gone together, or we could have split up.

ESPINO

Did you go back to the office that day?

RAZO

I'm sure we did. I always went back to the office to try and count noses, to see who's missing. I always tried to keep track of our people for a visual check-in. "Has anyone see Pat? Has anyone see Louie? Has anyone seen—?" to find out where they're at or to make telephone calls sometimes to their houses. Someone's got to be accountable for people, rather than saying, "Well, hopefully they'll show up," and for all you know, they might wind up being a casualty.

So the next day when we showed up, we had found out that Ruben Salazar had been killed.

ESPINO

Until the next day.

RAZO

Yes. So I told Raul, "We took pictures of that," because they mentioned the Silver Dollar.

And he said, "No, you're wrong. We didn't take pictures of that."

I said, "We took pictures of that. Let's go and develop the film."

So we did the proof sheets, and he says, "Man, we took pictures of that."

I said, "Good. We can come out with a special edition of that." Of course, unbeknownst to us, or at least unbeknown to me, that was when he was killed. He had been killed before, but we thought we had the pictures when he was killed.

So the word got out through our own grapevine that we had pictures, and we started

getting a special edition together, and Sal Castro found out about it. Sal came to see me, and then Raul came over, and he came over with Tom Brokaw. He was the anchor for Channel 4.

ESPINO

Brokaw?

RAZO

Right. He came over, and he says, “I hear you guys have some good footage.”

And I said, “Yeah, sure had good footage.”

He said, “Man, we sure would like to use it.” Of course, he was using Sal as a front man to get to us, and Sal was an acquaintance. He was not what I would call a friend.

So I said, “Let me show you something.”

So I showed him the photos we had. He salivated at the mouth and said, “I want those photos.”

I said, “Well, after we come out with our special edition, there shouldn’t be a problem. I have respect for you and the reporting you do, and we’ll see what we can do about it, but we’re going to have first shot.”

He says, “No problem.”

So that night, the general manager of Channel 4 came out and talked about the incident that occurred over on Whittier Boulevard was thuggery, nothing but thugs and people out of control, and blasting us from A to Z.

Next day, Tom called, and I said, “You can kiss my fanny. You can’t control your general manager. I know you work for him, but he’s calling us thugs and so forth, and we’re going to turn around and we’re going to make you look good, the station you work for? So you can tell him, “You lost a real good story.’” So I never turned those pictures over to him.

We published our edition of La Raza with our own photos and got good reaction, all the press was happy with it, and we called a press conference for the next day in which we were going to show our photos. The LA. Times wanted the photos, and Frank Del Olmo called, and I said, “Well, we’ll see, Frank. Let’s hold it off. We’re going to do our press conference.”

So we did our press conference, showed our photos and so forth. Well, unbeknownst to me, Raul had already cut a deal with Frank, and after the press conference he said, “I’ve got to go, Joe.” He went with Frank and turned over his photos to the L.A. Times, and that was my first inkling, “Okay, Raul is making his own move now. So I’m going to have to keep an eye on him.” At the same time, I really didn’t feel too alienated or pissed, because my goal as an organizer is to put people in a leadership position, and I saw that Raul really wanted to be a leader and to take the forefront.

As an organizer, you never make it too easy for the leaders of just saying ala Risco by leaving without telling us when he was going and then just turning it over and letting people just jockey for position. You make it a little harder for people to take it over, and if they’re able to take it over, then you say, hey, they had the potential to be a leader. But what I didn’t appreciate was the fact that there was no consultation, that just on his own he went out there, and that was the first time that I heard that Raul was calling himself the editor of La Raza the next day on the—and I don’t know whether he called himself or whether the paper described his back—

ESPINO

Gave him that title.

RAZO

—named him that, gave him that title. So I just said, “Okay, I’ll just keep an eye on them and see where that goes.” But that was my first inkling of, “Okay, this is a guy to not necessarily to trust.”

ESPINO

He’s moving up.

RAZO

Yes, he’s moving up.

ESPINO

I’m going to pause it just for a second. [interruption]

ESPINO

Okay. So when you first found out about Ruben Salazar’s death, how did you feel or how did you respond to that? Did you know him?

RAZO

Did I know—

ESPINO

Ruben Salazar?

RAZO

Oh, yes, I knew Ruben. But all of us had casual acquaintance with Ruben, and that casual acquaintance came from meeting him not necessarily in demonstrations, but meeting him in different sites where something was going on. I had met Ruben before and had had—I wouldn't call it a confrontation; I would call it a meeting. I received word one time before his death, way before his death, that Ruben and some of his friends were meeting together at United Way room, and that they were talking about grant money that was being given to El Barrio Communications Project. I said, wait a minute. That's the El Barrio Communications Project that Father Luce and Eleazar Risco turned into a 501(c)(3), a nonprofit organization, to get money from IFCO, the Inter Faith Community Organization Church, to initially, I guess, fund La Raza although I wasn't aware of that initially.

So I said, "What does El Barrio Communications Project have to do with that?" So I got Raul and I think maybe Luis and maybe Manuel Barrera, and said, "Hey, let's go over there and see what's happening." And we crashed the meeting. They weren't expecting us, and Ruben was there with a lawyer from New York, one of his buddies, and three or four other people, and they were talking about trying to get a bigger grant for media and having a group of media-related people staff that.

I asked them what it was all about, because they were surprised to see us there, and he says, "We received some money for El Barrio Communications Project."

And I said, "Are you aware that El Barrio Communications Project is our organization? I have the incorporation papers here with me. So are you trying to tell me that your soliciting grant money in our name from New York charitable groups without even touching base with us? Do you know what that's called? That's called thievery, and that's called ripping us off." So we had a give-and-take for a little while, and he was informed, "This shit better not happen again."

ESPINO

What did he say?

RAZO

He couldn't come up—for a newspaper reporter, you can come up with a reliable answer.

I said, "You're smart enough to know that all you have to do is call the Departments of Corporations up in Sacramento, and find out who the hell this belongs to. So it's not like you're dumb."

The younger guy that was with him that said, “Oh, Joe Razo, I remember you when you were at Cal State L.A., you were an athlete and all you did was run around, big star athlete.” He called me a couple of names for being a star athlete. I guess that was the only way he could get back to me. But it was made clear to Ruben that we did not appreciate him ripping us off, and that was the last contact I had with Ruben.

ESPINO

What do you think his intentions were?

RAZO

I really don’t know. His intentions were initially, as it was explained at that meeting, that that was just going to be seed money, and that seed money was to hire his friend who was an attorney in New York to fund them, and he would write a bigger proposal, more broader, more widespread to get bigger and bigger monies. We weren’t privy to that proposal. So they had gathered there as a small meeting to get ideas from one another and what they were going to do.

ESPINO

So you didn’t have respect for him as a journalist? You didn’t think he was a person of integrity?

RAZO

Well, it wasn’t an issue of respecting him as a journalist. It was lack of respect for what he did. I read his news stories before, and I said, “Hey, great.” I mean, he’s getting publicity for the movement. The more publicity the better. But most of the people will admit that he was more conservative than anything, and certainly after his death, we said, “Huh, another martyr. Okay. We’ll use his name to promote the movement.” So here’s another guy that walks on water, and once they’re dead they all walk on water for us. And more posters, all the whole fame, and we’ll go with it. We’ll organize around him or get parks named after him, statutes, the whole enchilada. That doesn’t necessarily mean it’s true. But we tried to reach the Salazar family through Danny Villanueva, who was close friend of Danny who played for the L.A. Rams as a football player, and the family didn’t want anything to do with the movement.

ESPINO

Really?

RAZO

Yes. My understanding is that it isn’t until lately when his daughter grew up, she was just a youngster at that time, and we really didn’t want them to settle for a slap in the hand from the county for Ruben’s death, which they wound up settling for.

ESPINO

The family?

RAZO

Yes. They didn't want Ruben to become a symbol of the Chicano Movement at that time.

ESPINO

Was he?

RAZO

No. He became a symbol, like Martin Luther King became a symbol after his death. All of a sudden among the militants before, they were talking about, "He's a sellout," and as soon as his death, then they said, "Oh, our father was killed." So organizers will always take advantage of labels and so forth, and Ruben was the second coming of Jesus Christ after he was killed.

ESPINO

But were people devastated, though, at hearing he was killed, or about the violence that erupted?

RAZO

Well, he was a face. He was a face not necessarily of the Chicano Movement, but other than Ernesto Moreno from KCT, PBS channel, they were the only faces that we had in media. Ruben was the only one that was writing articles, and it wasn't like he was writing articles all the time. Every now and then the people would identify, "Hey, at least he's talking about the community." But it was never anything to what we were getting now. It was never really a strong, "Yes, we need to do this. We need to do that."

He was not what you would call at the forefront. He was at the forefront because he was one of few people that was doing that. And his wife came out and made statements and saying, "Ruben was conservative." I mean, he wasn't really a left-winger and that kind of stuff. He was trying to give it the All-American look, and I had no problem with that. I felt that's what it was. But the people that were probably to the left of him that were his friends were the cameramen, reporters from KMEX, who took a much more forceful line than he did in their reports and coverage. So, yes.

ESPINO

Even Rosalio was. The press conference, the inquisition, the inquiry—

RAZO

Inquest.

ESPINO

—inquest. "Inquisition." I always say that. That was an indictment of the police, and that

was something that seemed to contextualize his death within the Chicano Movement, looking at police abuse and that kind of thing.

RAZO

Again, you have to look at what the role of organizers are. Gustav Montag, who also was killed, the Brown Beret that got killed, I mean, when they were alive, no one was building statutes of them. No one was saying they walk on water. No one was calling them the greatest thing next to J.C. But as soon as their death comes, you use it as a means of empowering your people and saying, “Look, if they can kill that guy in the alleyway, who else can they kill? If they can kill an L.A. Times reporter, Ruben Salazar, god, who is next? Is Cesar Chavez going to be next? This is a police state. This is a police nation. They have no shame. They can kill anyone. So we have to do something about it.”

So, yes, it’s used as an organizing tactic, and you take advantage of it and you blow it up for whatever mileage you can get out of it. Yes, Ruben had a role. What his role would have been if he were alive remains to be seen, because at the same time that we were pushing for Ruben’s memory, a lot of people were also going in and trying to break open the media and create job opportunities for Chicanos in it, radio stations, KPFK. We had a radio station there for a while, and then eventually Raul and Louie took it over. I was there before them, and we were trying to get our footing in every media that we could. In fact, they used us many times by just saying, “Joe, we want to hire a Latino. Can you get a whole bunch of people over here to audition?”

“When do you need them?”

“We need them today.”

“Why today?”

“Because today’s the last day.”

“Wait a minute. How come you didn’t call us weeks before? Why just the last day?”

“Because the FCC.” The FCC, they want to look good in front of them of saying, “Look.”

ESPINO

Diversity.

RAZO

“We interviewed a lot of minorities.”

So, yes, that went on all the time, and we kept saying, “Wed ‘em, bed ‘em, marry ‘em, do whatever it is with any of the media people, whatever you do, but we need to break down those doors and we need to get our people in there. We need to get some brown faces.” And certainly Ruben’s death helped.

ESPINO

Did you feel like he represented the Chicano community as far as—because, okay, on the one hand you’re saying we needed to get brown faces in there, and he was a brown face in there, but is that the same?

RAZO

Well, like, he was the only face that we had, and it’s better to have a face than no face at all. No, I didn’t see Ruben as the voice of the Chicano Movement.

ESPINO

No.

RAZO

No, but I will certainly put his picture up on a poster and push him as a Chicano Movement. I’m an organizer, and I’m sure that Rosalio did the same thing, and I’m sure that Raul will tell you the same thing. Was he the voice, was he the father of our media voice, no. No, no. I mean, even La Opinion that was more leaning Republican at that time was printing out sometimes, taking a stronger stand, but he did touch base on the community, and people appreciated that. I identified more with the KMEX people. They were much, much stronger than that.

ESPINO

How devastating was his death to the community? Did it change how people came out in support of issues?

RAZO

I think it helped. I think it helped, yes.

ESPINO

You don’t think it hurt?

RAZO

No. I think, again, if you push a line of thought and saying, “He was our voice, he was our idol,” people pick it up. It doesn’t necessarily mean it’s true, doesn’t necessarily mean that we’re lying to people. It just means that we’re taking advantage of a fallen person, and especially a person who’s there in whatever role he was. Just covering the event and then being killed in that manner certainly didn’t hurt the movement at all.

ESPINO

You mentioned something—what did you say—that the movement was a dying horse.

RAZO

Well, to me, after the Chicano Moratorium, I saw it was waning, the interest waning. The reason I say that is because I didn't limit myself to strictly speaking to the people that were in the movement. If you want to get a feel for what's going on, you have to go outside your friends in the movement. If you strictly spoke to the people at La Raza, the Brown Berets, and LUCHAs, the Rosalios and so forth, we would speak to each other and would, "Hey, you know, what happened?"

"Oh, man, we're breaking down doors. Look at what we're doing. [demonstrates] Wow. [Spanish phrase]. I mean, the advances we are making. And, Corky, what do you think?"

"Oh, man, [demonstrates], we are really making gains left and right."

If you take it outside of the people that aren't involved that are Mexican Americans, your regular John Doe that's working at the factory and you talk to them, some are still in the Dark Ages. Some of them hear about it, have negative views, some have positive views, more are more neutral. "Oh, yeah, well, I really don't know."

It's sort of like voting for a candidate. "What do you know about him?"

"Well, I don't know. The thirty-second info-commercial that I hear says that he's a good man."

"But what do you really know about the issue?"

"Not too much, but I'm going to vote for him."

Well, the movement was, to a great extent, a lot of that. We communicated among ourselves, and we thought we were the greatest thing on earth. I mean, the accomplishments that we were just advancing were just tremendous. And when you went outside, then you didn't think quite in the same manner. But as an organizer, you also knew that no publicity or even bad publicity is good publicity because you are keeping the issues going. As long as the media is covering the issues, you're making gains. You're keeping those issues alive and you're educating people and people are having to decide one way or the other. Or some people just basically say, "Yes, I heard about it." Even now I speak to some people, and I keep saying, "Well, I've got a photographic collection that I'm doing, and this."

"We haven't seen you, Joe." And I tell them about the collection. "Oh, the Chicano Movement. Oh, were you in the Chicano Movement?" The way they say it, they say it in a tone of reverence of, "Wow, that's good that was going. Wish you best of luck," and that was it. But were they actively involved? No. They heard about it, now they support it. And it's the same thing with many of our young people, that we talk to about all the events and they know nothing about it.

ESPINO

Yes. I heard from some people that the violence terrified them, and they took a second look as is this really—do I want to keep risking my life?

RAZO

And I think that's very true, and I think not only did the violence hurt them, people with the movement, but people outside of the movement the violence hurt them. I remember Mickey Northrup, who was a Chicano, born of an Irish father, who was born in the same impoverished conditions that I was. He was a boxer. I remember seeing Mickey near Whittier Boulevard. I was going through, jumping some fences, through some houses to take some pictures, and the cops had cordoned us off. Mickey looked at me and frowned, and I went up to him and I said, "Mickey, how you doing, buddy?"

He was maybe about ten years older than I was. And Mickey said, "Well, Joe, what the hell are you doing out here?"

I said, "I'm taking pictures."

He said, "Don't tell me you're involved in all this shit."

And I said, "Yes, I'm involved in all this shit, Mickey."

And he said, "But there's just so much violence going on, man. What's that? People are getting killed and all that."

Well, he had no inkling and no background of knowing movement issues. He was just one of those guys that live in the barrio and saw television and saw the riots and never really got involved.

And many people in the movement, especially nuns that were involved in Católicos Por La Raza, came to me afterwards, nuns that had been working in our community and ex-priests, and said, "Hey, man, we didn't expect the violence at Saint Basil's to happen. We went there for Christmas Mass, and we thought it was going to be peaceful, and after a

while, you guys are pushing the doors open from inside the church because they won't let us in, and you guys are fighting the cops back. I mean, you're not turning any cheeks, [Spanish word] and everything. Then some people are running downstairs to the church basement and pulling the doors open, and guys are running from downstairs in the cellar of the church to the upstairs of the church and pulling the cloth from the vestibule where the challis and everything is. I mean, that's violence. We didn't expect that."

And you say, "Well, next time, be careful of the demonstrations that you attend, because we are not going to turn our cheeks. If someone strikes us, we are going to strike them back."

The tactics that were used, I don't quite understand. I may not agree with everything. Why people went down to the basement to pull open the doors just to get to the upstairs, we could have done it through the first floor, through the vestibule. Then the white parishioners singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" and trying to drown us out, I mean, it was surreal. It was a movie. The barbarians have invaded us, type of thing.

But, yes, the violence did turn off a lot of people. But the publicity that came out of it also gave us a lot of good because the word went out, so the Chicano Movement spread out. There were more demonstrations from many other churches and in other states. And same thing with the antiwar moratoriums. After the moratorium occurred here, about fifteen other moratoriums started in different cities.

ESPINO

Throughout the Southwest.

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

But it seemed like the movement, like you say, was a dying horse.

RAZO

Well, to me, I felt that it was waning, and the reason I felt that it was waning is because I was getting opinions outside from the "in" group, and that after the Chicano Moratorium, I hung around for maybe about nine months more. I went to law school, and when I was in law school, then no one seemed to be picking up the organizing around the Ruben Salazar issue. I was still picking up the mail and trying to stay in class without failing and trying to run La Raza, and finally I dropped out of law school to come back and to organize around the issue of the Ruben Salazar's death to push it. But shortly thereafter, I went back because a priest said, "Drop out and I'll bring you back," and he brought me back through Richard Cruz but basically through the father and saying, "I promised I'd bring you back, I like what you're doing, keep it up, but this time concentrate on law school."

ESPINO

So nothing came out of your activism around the Ruben Salazar death?

RAZO

No, no, except the publicity of trying to organize it, and that's when I decided, again, we're kicking a dying horse. I saw Raul starting to play with the Marxes, the Lenins, the A-to-Z ideology, and my trying to do it on a part-time basis was not going to work. I saw many different organizations forming all around different personalities.

ESPINO

Not issues?

RAZO

Not issues, yes.

ESPINO

Then how did you become involved in La Raza Unida Party?

RAZO

Well, before that, La Raza Unida Party was the last breath that I took with them. Raul wanted to run, and I said, "Okay, let's—."

ESPINO

That was in the seventies?

RAZO

I think that was in the seventies, or maybe we made our first attempt even before then, in which he ran against Richard Alatorre and Ralph Ochoa, and he ran for assemblyman in this area, part of which was Alhambra. We did a lot of canvassing, a lot of knocking on doors, and I did not really participate on a full-time basis.

ESPINO

That was '71 when he ran.

RAZO

Right. What I saw was that La Raza Unida in Texas was different than La Raza Unida here. I saw that we had tried before with Peace and Freedom Party to form a third political party, and that failed miserably, and that people were enthusiastic for about one or two years and then it would die off. The Peace and Freedom Party was still trying to get it on. I went to a couple of sessions in which we were supposed to talk about La Raza Unida. I delivered a speech, and the Peace and Freedom Party delivered their pitch, and then the crowd started

talking about, “Why don’t you guys band together?”

We spoke to the Peace and Freedom Parties and they had a different agenda. They basically wanted us to support them. I think it was, jeez, I don’t know, Covina or somewhere, and I said, “Thank you, but no thank you.”

Raul wanted to make a run for Assembly. I didn’t really discuss it too much with him. I felt the better tactic would be to start small, take a city where there would be a sizable population of Latinos where we can elect someone. But he wanted to jump into the Assembly right away, statewide office. That’s a big bite to leap. He had already run before in the La Raza Unida Party. He had run for the incorporation of East L.A. They tried to incorporate East L.A. into a city, but it didn’t have the financial basis to support itself. So Raul came in second on that ballot. Richard Polanco, who was supported by Esteban Torres and TELACU, wanted to incorporate the city, and Polanco came in first. So it would be the top five would be city councilmen. Richard later on became a Senator in the California Legislature.

Well, later on it came to naught because they didn’t have the financial basis to incorporate the city, but Raul wet his lips from that and decided, “I’ll go for the Assembly.” So I half-heartedly participated in that but I thought it was too much of a big leap to take, and we were running against Ralph Ochoa, who was a supporter of Leo McCarthy, and Leo was throwing in money. Leo McCarthy, I think he might have been the Majority Speaker at that time, or maybe just an assemblyman, and all the San Francisco crowd, there were about three assemblymen from that area, and they were backing Ralph Ochoa. Richard Alatorre was supported by the Willie Brown crowd.

ESPINO

So Ralph Ochoa was backed. Was he a Republican?

RAZO

No, he was a Democrat.

ESPINO

He was a Democrat?

RAZO

Yes.

ESPINO

And Alatorre’s a Democrat?

RAZO

And Alatorre's a Democrat, and I think Art Snyder or someone—there was a Republican; I don't know if it was Art Snyder—was also running in that area.

ESPINO

Yes, I forget his name.

RAZO

What happened is that we fractured the Democratic vote so badly that a Republican wound up getting elected in a Democratic Assembly district. But you also have to realize that at that time the Democratic Party was really not sinking any major money or resources behind any Chicano that was in the Democratic Party. They had ignored Richard Calderon when he ran for Congress. The only one that we had been able to elect was Julian Nava and then our congressman, Ed Roybal. So that was one hell of a surprise to the Democratic Party. The only thing we wound up doing was catching the attention of the Democratic Party to where they realized now they were going to have to dig deep into their pockets and get the resources out whenever we had a Chicano candidate.

ESPINO

So you're saying that was a success of that—

RAZO

That was a success for La Raza Unida because it forced the Democratic Party to pay attention. But in electing La Raza Unida candidates it was a total failure, and it was one of many of Raul's races where he became a perennial candidate such as we had one before that used to run for everything from dogcatcher to Senate to president to everything. So that sort of became a joke to where then they tried to duplicate the same thing that Crystal City was doing and run Daniel Zapata for another race, city treasurer or something, and they would run Julia Mount for something, Luna for something. So they had about five or six candidates. They were never able to get much votes.

ESPINO

So when you say "they," there was a specific community or committee?

RAZO

Well, Raul started going and organizing after that defeat for La Raza Unida and meeting with Jose Angel Gutierrez from Texas, even taking all of the troops to Crystal City and seeing how Crystal City was being run because La Raza Unida had taken over just about every job in Crystal City.

ESPINO

They wanted that to occur in East Los Angeles, hence the—

RAZO

Well, they wanted it to occur in any city that they could capture. Then they started going Northern La Raza Unida, Southern La Raza Unida, Corky Gonzales La Raza Unida, Jose Angel Texas La Raza Unida. Then there would be splits, and then the MAPistas and all the other groups who were Democrats would say, “We want to sign up for La Raza Unida” in order to infiltrate La Raza Unida, but slanted more towards the Democratic Party rather than to La Raza Unida. Then it became a lot of infighting from within the MAPistas and the G.I. Forums and those types of people. Then with the Corkys and the Rauls and the Jose Angels, who would say, “Well, if we can’t elect La Raza Unida, we are going to be a broker for the Democratic Party,” and that was an Jose Angel Gutierrez line. Corky Gonzales and Raul Ruiz were, “No, we’re going to be purists. We are not going to sell out to the Democratic Party.”

ESPINO

But Jose Angel—

RAZO

Jose Angel was more realistic, “We will be a broker.”

ESPINO

Is that the same thing, selling out and being a broker?

RAZO

Well, you know, it all depends. With anyone that’s a purist, anything that you do outside of your work for an establishment group, that’s a sellout. So sellout can be measured on a scale. That’s why purists alienate so many people and at the same time why they don’t have a broader base. You have to bring in the base of people, otherwise you are so pure that after a while, you look in the mirror, and you’re the only one you see. You say, “Come on, gang,” and you look behind you, and no one is following you.

ESPINO

So back, even back then, you were not gung-ho about the third-party idea?

RAZO

Well, I saw it as a movement, but, no, I was not a strong favorite of—I saw it as a tactic, and there’s a difference between a tactic and a strategy. A tactic is one step towards achieving something. A strategy is something you develop for the long-range goal. I saw that as a short-range goal.

ESPINO

Did you change your affiliation?

RAZO

You said, “Let’s see what we can do with it.” But it’s like when people say, “Well, how do

you train for a marathon, or how do you do something? How do you eat an elephant?" and the answer is, "One bite at a time." You don't bite the whole elephant. You can't swallow the elephant. And I saw that as we are going to bite, we are going to swallow the elephant when we haven't even taken a first bite, and with very little background in elections. People in Texas were ages in advance of the people here in California in terms of electioneering and organizing around elections. We were primitives compared to them.

ESPINO

Did you change your party affiliation? Did you become La Raza Unida? I mean, were you registered Democrat and then you—

RAZO

Well, I don't even know if there was a La Raza Unida or if you registered as Independent.

ESPINO

Independent?

RAZO

Yes. I may have. I've changed. I've been through everything from A to Z. I've even registered Republican once with "Give me a ballot in Spanish." So you do everything for tactics. How many Republicans ask for a Spanish ballot?

ESPINO

Juan Gomez Quinones has a huge critique of the La Raza Unida Party in Los Angeles, and he says that it failed because of the incompetent efforts of those who were trying to organize around that party.

RAZO

I would agree with him. I would agree with him. Again, people put the blinders on. If you only speak to those same people, you think, "Wow, we are really advancing." These people ought to get out of the neighborhood and speak to other people. You wind up being dreamers. I had the same problem not only with La Raza Unida, I had the same problem with Richard Cruz with Católicos Por La Raza. After we left and after I graduated from law school and I came out, then I became a clerk at his law firm along with Carmelita Ramirez, who is now city councilwoman at Oxnard. She went to Loyola Law School and ran for mayor of Oxnard this last time. Other law clerks were Antonio Hernandez, who was a law student over at UCLA and later on became head of MALDEF and now she's heading some nonprofit organization; with Ronald Mendoza, who is now an administration law judge with the state. We were all interns with Ricardo.

Well, Ricardo knew, because I helped him so much with Católicos Por La Raza. He wanted me to help him start Abogados de Azlatan. Since I had ties with many religious organizations, and was on the Board of Directors with a religious funding organization in New York that Father Luce got me on. We received some seed money on a proposal to start

Abogados and came back with 25,000 bucks and said, “You have enough for rent here and to hire a lawyer.”

Richard Cruz and Miguel Garcia had just graduated from Loyola Law School, had taken and passed the bar, but were not immediately admitted to the bar because of their involvement with Católicos Por La Raza. They only had one bust. I had five busts. They were trying to recruit a lawyer, and every lawyer that talked to them would give them a song and dance. All the people that were in the movement, Antonio Rodriguez is, “Well, I want to open my own firm.” Percy Duran is, “Go get ‘em, tigers. I’d like to go my own way.” Richard, Rudy Diaz, “Well, I’m tied into the Van de Kamp people, and I think I will try to go some other way.”

Every lawyer, Gregorio Moreno and some of the others, “Well, we want to start our own law firm.” Every lawyer wants to start their own law firm. No one wanted to do a collective. Initially Ricardo and I had talked about starting something like a MALDEF. MALDEF at that time was going down. Herman Sillas, I think, had already resigned, and MALDEF was not doing anything exciting. The issue became how do you sustain a law firm? Organize around relevant issues in the community while at the same time being able to feed yourself, your families, and so on and so forth.

Well, Ricardo was involved in many things. The same thing like all the other people, different women, all this kind of stuff, and no one would really make a commitment to come in and be the Abogados lawyer. Finally, I just went to Ricardo and said, “Goodbye, brother. You’re wasting my time. I’m older than you guys, five to eight years, and you guys are still whistling in the dark. You keep saying, ‘Hang around, hang around. It will come, Joe. Be patient.’ I said, “I don’t have that kind of patience and time. I’ll see you.”

I left that deal, and Abogados functioned for about, oh, four or five more years, and they were a good group to generate money. Rosalio’s brother was also involved in it, Ricardo.

ESPINO

At the same time, these lawyers were working for the Center for Law and Justice?

RAZO

They were all looking for places to land, and some of them were lawyers that already were working for the state or were just coming out of law school, being admitted to the bar, and were looking for employment.

Ralph Ochoa had worked for the Western Center on War on Poverty. He had graduated from law school but he was not a lawyer. He was part of Leo McCarthy’s group, and Leo had taken him to—first, he was a local administrative assistant for Leo here in Los Angeles and then later went to become his head administrative aide in Sacramento once Leo became the Speaker. No one seemed to want to make a commitment, although Ralph Ochoa was not part of that group. I just saw them floundering, floundering, and not only that, not keeping

their blinders on to organizing but doing a lot of extracurricular stuff. I kept saying, “That’s not why I’m going to law school and that’s not why I’m an organizer.” So I bid adieu and went to work for the Chicano Coalition. The Chicano Coalition, as I mentioned before, was a group that was financed by Edward Roybal.

ESPINO

You said it was the Congress for Mexican Americans. Is that what it was called?

RAZO

Congress. The Congress of—yes. Chicago Coalition? Yes, it might have been the Congress of Mex or the Chicago Coalition. Yes, it might have been Chicano Coalition, and that was supposed to include fifty-something, fifty-six different groups.

Eventually after a year when they were no long renewed their funding, then Ralph Ochoa called me and he said, “I’d like you to join us in Sacramento.” I was looking for a job because I was having trouble getting hired, just the same as the Rosalios, the David Sanchezes, all of us. Everyone welcomes our involvement, but they never offer you a job. They’ll send you those birthday cards.

I went up to Sacramento with my wife, we looked it over, and my wife said, “No, that’s not for me.”

So I said, “Okay. I’ll do the commute, and I’ll stay there for a while.” I would fly every Friday and try and come back every—I would fly up every Monday morning at the six a.m. fight, Sacramento, and come back every Friday night unless I had work out there to do. And my kids were still young. By that time I had had three kids.

I went to work for the Assembly, and, fortunately, I was looked upon as a political appointee, and so I was free to work for the Assembly Office of Research, to do what I wanted to do. I chose to go into labor law and to follow the Farm Workers. I would travel up and down the state seeing what Cesar Chavez was doing and attending many other conferences from the farmers, the Farm Workers, and Teamsters, and all the five parties were jockeying to see who was going to be the number one in that agricultural organizing fight.

The Agricultural Labor Relations Board came into being through the legislature. It was promoted by Governor Brown, formed an agency that was supposed to run secret-ballot elections for the Farm Workers to see if they could get collective bargaining in numerous farms. The agency became very controversial, there were a lot of problems with the agency, and Roger Mahony became the head of the agency. Cardinal Mahony, our same Cardinal Mahony, was appointed by Governor Brown to head the board of directors.

ESPINO

That was when he was very young and starting off in his career.

RAZO

Yes. Well, he had already been involved, and he might have been close to being a bishop. He was in the pipeline. I met him over there and we had various discussions. They formed the agency, and the agency was in shambles because Cesar tried to stack the agency with all his people to be hired as investigators. The Teamsters tried to get their people in. The farmers tried to get their people in. So you found a lot of [Spanish word] that were hired that were Spanish speakers, but unlike when you get married, you usually take a man's last name, except for you, but what happened here is that the men would take a woman's last name because women had Spanish surnames. So you find Joe Smith Rodriguez, because they wanted to be hired. Since they were Spanish speakers, the agency was hiring them. Everyone was lining up to see who was in the pipeline for hiring. The investigators and agents were supposed to be neutral people that were conducting secret-ballot elections, and by that time the agency became so controversial with biases that the legislature defunded them through the Republican Party.

I received a call from Leo McCarthy, although we weren't really on a first-name basis—I saw him every now and then—that they were going to put a San Francisco Democrat by the name of Floyd Mori. He was Japanese American, and he had a background with some of the farmers, Nisei American farmers, but he was a Democrat and in Leo's camp. He had voted for Leo to be Speaker, and Leo was involved in a battle with Willie Brown for the speakership. Of course, Richard Alatorre was already an assemblyman up there, and so was Art Torres.

So they said, "Since you've been following the Farm Workers, we want you to be the senior consultant and head up a committee between five senators and five assemblymen, and you will staff it and you could hire a couple of other people to help you, and you'll answer to Floyd. You'll be the liaison for the legislature, and you keep us abreast as to who's backstabbing whom, who's doing what to whom and who's sleeping with who, and the legislators, and all the hanky-panky that's going on, because, in essence, we're creating this committee, and just between you and me, it's called a Lightning Rod Committee."

I said, "Lightning Rod Committee? What the hell does that mean?"

"Well, when the lightning strikes, it strikes the committee rather than the legislators, and because if we don't have this type of committee, a lot of legislators from farm country are in trouble, because if the farmers feel that they're siding with Governor Brown. I can also lose their vote as Speaker. So you'll be a staff for this."

So I left the Assembly Office of Research and went and staffed this committee for about two and a half, three years, and traveled up and down the state and wrote briefs of all the legal decisions that Mahony and all the other people were voting on and, of course, touch base with all the other parties involved and who was doing who to what and report it to Leo or his aides that some of the people working for the Agricultural Labor Relations Board were

wearing buttons at the balloting that said “UFW.”

If you’re supposed to be neutral, why are you—and some of the other people were wearing farmers’ buttons or were taking airplane rides from the farmers, who would transport them from one city to where the election was going to take place to another, and they would also get cases of wine. Some of the agents who conduct the election were from the Labor Commissioner’s Office, because the ALRB didn’t have enough permanent staff, and saying, “If the politicians were afraid that if the agents were biased and the news picked it up, the agency would be adversely affected.”

ESPINO

Jeez.

RAZO

So then the governor’s people came to me, “Well, what’s this?”

I said, “No, I haven’t taken pictures. I don’t carry cameras.”

Then they had the Posse Comitatus that said, “If you come in my farm, trespassers will be shot. This includes state officials.” There were farmers and they had these signs posted on the farm fences. Some of the Teamsters were getting secret-ballot election authorizations from the Farm Workers, and then they would sell them to whoever. I mean, they were selling out people. There was so much bad stuff going around.

ESPINO

Sounds like it.

RAZO

And fights, you know. Farmers’ sheds going up in flames.

ESPINO

Jeez.

RAZO

So not a peaceful movement, you know, from Cesar.

ESPINO

Yes, it sounds similar. Yes, it sounds similar but—

RAZO

Yes, I was doing the same thing.

ESPINO

But at the same time, they had more power than movement activists. It sounds like similar infighting that was occurring, people were vying for power, but in Sacramento they did have some power, political power.

RAZO

I even got a telephone call one day from Raul over here that says, “Hey, I understand you’re selling out.”

I said, “What the hell are you talking?”

“Well, some people said that you took a stand or something.”

I said, “I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about, Raul.”

“I feel better now after talking to you, Joe,” type of—you know.

ESPINO

Right.

RAZO

And everyone tries to use you over there.

ESPINO

I’m sure.

RAZO

Dolores Huerta invited me one day to a conference, and I thought it was just going to be a general conference. She gets up there and she says, “Oh, we’d like to welcome Joe, who works for the committee to oversee the Agricultural Labor Relations Board for the legislature.” We’re supposed to be neutral. She said, “I want you to know that Joe is in our camp, and I keep trying to recruit him as an organizer for the UFW.” And I keep saying, “What a setup. Okay. I’ve got you on my list. I know where you’re coming from.” She never minded burning people if she could get you on their camp to organize for Cesar.

ESPINO

Right. Like you were mentioning before how someone’s death could be used—

RAZO

Oh, yes, organizers have no qualm, no conscience, you know, if they can use you. And here I'm on a low budget, I'm trying to keep a house afloat, I have an apartment over there, no spending money. Oftentimes [unclear] would say, "Hey, Joe, let's go eat."

Okay. But five or seven other people come over and you go to a restaurant, and after they finish, then they pull a cute one. "Joe, would you get the bill? We'll catch you next time." Okay, I guess I don't eat for the next week. [laughs] But that's organizing. So you quickly learn who to trust and who not to trust, whether it's Raul, whether it's Dolores and so on. You say, "Okay." You've got to walk with eyes in the back of your head.

Or even with legislative aides out there, consultants just like you, if you mention something, if you have an idea for legislation and you talk to someone about it, next day you will see it in bill form, even though it's your idea. They'll take it, they'll run with it, they'll introduce it next. So you learn to trust no one up there. So it's every dog for themselves out there.

ESPINO

Yes. I think we're going to stop right here, and I'm not sure—let me pause it for a second before I—

RAZO

Later, yes.

ESPINO

I know. I think we're going to wrap up here. I want to thank you so much for giving me your time and for sharing these wonderful stories with me and important historical insight. I learned a lot from this interview. I'm going to stop it right now. [End of March 25, 2013 interview]
